









MADAM BUTTERFLY

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# FAVOURITE OPERAS

FROM MOZART TO MASCAGNI  
THEIR PLOTS HISTORY AND MUSIC

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WITH TWENTY-FOUR  
DRAWINGS IN COLOUR BY  
BYAM SHAW



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## P R E F A C E

THIS book is avowedly for the musical amateur who goes to the opera and wants to know chiefly what the particular opera being staged is "all about." Details—more or less full, according to the popularity or importance of the work—are added regarding the music and the history of the various operas dealt with, while a short biographical account of the composer is given in every case. In a word, the matter presented is such as may confidently be expected to interest intelligent listeners, and add to their enjoyment of the performance.

With respect to the operas selected for notice, I have gone upon the principle of including only such works as are constantly being presented, or have recently been revived. As to this, perhaps it ought to be observed that operatic popularity means one thing in London, and often quite another thing in the provinces. Also, that several of the older operas are staged for different reasons—some for the prima donna and some for the public. Again, opera-goers are still left who like to renew the pleasures of their youth, or to realise what it was that charmed their grandparents. I accept the facts as they stand, and plan my book accordingly.

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## P R E F A C E

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It will be seen that I have made no attempt at historical continuity, though I have naturally begun with Mozart, and as naturally ended with Strauss. Further, it ought perhaps to be said, as accounting for a greater fulness of treatment, that "Faust," "Carmen," the Verdi operas, "The Bohemian Girl," "Madam Butterfly," and "Cavalleria" and "Pagliacci," have already formed the subjects of separate volumes issued by the publishers in a series devoted to the Great Operas.

For the sections dealing with "Madam Butterfly," and with the story and the music of "Cavalleria" and "Pagliacci," I am indebted to Miss J. C. Drysdale. To her also I wish to acknowledge my obligations for much helpful aid in the preparation of the work. For the rest, I can only express the hope that the book will prove as acceptable as its previous companion volume, "The Operas of Richard Wagner."

J. C. H.

EDINBURGH, *August* 1910.



# CONTENTS

MOZART'S MASTER-WORKS :	PAGE
THE COMPOSER . . . . .	1
"DON GIOVANNI" . . . . .	4
"THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO" . . . . .	9
"THE MAGIC FLUTE" . . . . .	14
BEETHOVEN'S "FIDELIO" :	
THE COMPOSER . . . . .	18
"FIDELIO" . . . . .	21
GOUNOD'S "FAUST" AND "ROMEO" :	
THE COMPOSER . . . . .	26
"FAUST" IN MUSIC AND LITERATURE . . . . .	28
THE LIBRETTO . . . . .	29
THE MUSIC . . . . .	37
HISTORY OF THE OPERA . . . . .	40
"ROMEO AND JULIET" . . . . .	47
THOMAS' "MIGNON" . . . . .	50
AUBER'S "MASANIELLO" AND "FRA DIAVOLO" :	
"MASANIELLO" . . . . .	54
"FRA DIAVOLO" . . . . .	56
HALÉVY'S "LA JUIVE" . . . . .	58
HÉROLD'S "ZAMPA" . . . . .	62
BOIELDIEU'S "LA DAME BLANCHE" . . . . .	65
VERDI OPERAS :	
THE COMPOSER . . . . .	69
"RIGOLETTO" . . . . .	75
"IL TROVATORE" . . . . .	78
"LA TRAVIATA" . . . . .	82
"AÏDA" . . . . .	87
PONCHIELLI'S "LA GIOCONDA" . . . . .	93

# CONTENTS

	PAGE
<b>ROSSINI'S "BARBER" AND "TELL":</b>	
THE COMPOSER . . . . .	94
"THE BARBER OF SEVILLE" . . . . .	97
"WILLIAM TELL" . . . . .	101
<b>DONIZETTI SURVIVALS:</b>	
THE COMPOSER . . . . .	105
"LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR" . . . . .	106
"LUCREZIA BORGIA" . . . . .	108
"LA FILLE DU REGIMENT" . . . . .	109
"LA FAVORITA" . . . . .	110
"DON PASQUALE" . . . . .	111
<b>BELLINI'S BEST:</b>	
THE COMPOSER . . . . .	113
"LA SONNAMBULA" . . . . .	114
"NORMA" . . . . .	116
"I PURITANI" . . . . .	118
FLOTOW'S "MARTHA" . . . . .	121
<b>BIZET'S "CARMEN":</b>	
THE COMPOSER . . . . .	124
THE LIBRETTO . . . . .	131
THE MUSIC . . . . .	136
THE HISTORY . . . . .	147
<b>WEBER'S "DER FREISCHÜTZ":</b>	
THE COMPOSER . . . . .	153
"DER FREISCHÜTZ" . . . . .	155
<b>MEYERBEER'S "HUGUENOTS" AND "ROBERT LE DIABLE":</b>	
THE COMPOSER . . . . .	160
"THE HUGUENOTS" . . . . .	163
"ROBERT LE DIABLE" . . . . .	166
NICOLAI'S "MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR" . . . . .	169
<b>BALFE'S "BOHEMIAN GIRL":</b>	
THE COMPOSER . . . . .	171
THE LIBRETTO . . . . .	175
THE MUSIC . . . . .	181
THE HISTORY . . . . .	183
WALLACE'S "MARITANA" . . . . .	187

# CONTENTS

	PAGE
BENEDICT'S "LILY OF KILLARNEY" . . . . .	190
THOMAS'S "ESMERALDA" . . . . .	193
PUCCINI'S "BUTTERFLY" "BOHÈME" AND "TOSCA":	
THE COMPOSER . . . . .	196
"BUTTERFLY"—THE HISTORY . . . . .	197
THE STORY . . . . .	199
THE MUSIC . . . . .	213
"LA BOHÈME" . . . . .	233
"LA TOSCA" . . . . .	236
MASCAGNI'S "CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA":	
THE COMPOSER . . . . .	239
"CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA" . . . . .	245
THE MUSIC . . . . .	251
LEONCAVALLO'S "I PAGLIACCI":	
THE COMPOSER . . . . .	258
"I PAGLIACCI" . . . . .	262
THE MUSIC . . . . .	268
SAINT-SAËNS' "SAMSON AND DELILAH" . . . . .	276
TSCHAIKOWSKY'S "EUGENE ONEGIN" . . . . .	279
DEBUSSY'S "PELLÉAS AND MÉLISANDE" . . . . .	283
STRAUSS' "ELEKTRA" . . . . .	286



# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

MADAM BUTTERFLY . . . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
FAUST :	
"WHILE OLD MAMMON LEADS THE BALL" . . . . .	<i>To face page</i> 28
"FOR EVER!" . . . . .	" " 32
"NO, THOU SHALT PRAY NO MORE" . . . . .	" " 40
"LET EARTH BE SEVERE, HEAVEN IS FORGIVING" . . . . .	" " 46
VERDI :	
SALE AT TERRAZZO CON AND LANTERNA . . . . .	" " 76
"ONE PRICE THERE IS—ONE I KNOW AND THAT TO YOU I OFFER" . . . . .	" " 80
"DO YOU ALL HERE KNOW THIS WOMAN?" . . . . .	" " 82
"THOU MY RIVAL? WHAT THOUGH IT WERE SO?" . . . . .	" " 88
CARMEN :	
CARMEN . . . . .	" " 124
CARMEN AND JOSÉ . . . . .	" " 136
"I WILL DANCE FOR THY PLEASURE" . . . . .	" " 144
"I YIELD ME PRISONER: I HAVE KILLED HER" . . . . .	" " 152
BOHEMIAN GIRL :	
THE RESCUE OF ARLINE . . . . .	" " 172
"THE HEART BOWED DOWN" . . . . .	" " 176
ARLINE AVOWS HER LOVE FOR THADDEUS . . . . .	" " 182
"I DREAMT I DWELT IN MARBLE HALLS" . . . . .	" " 186
MADAM BUTTERFLY :	
"IN EVERLASTING TORMENT MAY YOUR WICKED SOUL PERISH" . . . . .	" " 200
EXIT YAMADORI . . . . .	" " 216
THE END . . . . .	" " 224
CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA :	
TURIDDU, SANTUZZA, AND LOLA AT THE CHURCH DOOR . . . . .	" " 240
SANTUZZA TELLS ALFIO OF HIS WIFE'S FALSENESS . . . . .	" " 248
I PAGLIACCI :	
NEDDA AND HER LOVER . . . . .	" " 264
COLUMBINE AND HARLEQUIN AT SUPPER . . . . .	" " 272



## INDEX OF OPERAS

- Aida, 87  
Barber of Seville, 97  
Bohème, La, 233  
Bohemian Girl, 171  
Carmen, 124  
Cavalleria Rusticana, 245  
Dame Blanche, La, 65  
Don Giovanni, 4  
Don Pasquale, 111  
Elektra, 286  
Esmeralda, 193  
Eugene Onegin, 279  
Faust, 28  
Favorita, La, 110  
Fidelio, 21  
Fille du Regiment, La, 109  
Fra Diavolo, 56  
Freischütz, Der, 155  
Gioconda, La, 93  
Huguenots, The, 163  
Juive, La, 58  
Lily of Killarney, 190  
Lucia di Lammermoor, 106  
Lucrezia Borgia, 108  
Madam Butterfly, 197  
Magic Flute, 14  
Maritana, 187  
Marriage of Figaro, 9  
Martha, 121  
Masaniello, 54  
Merry Wives of Windsor, 169  
Mignon, 50  
Norma, 116  
Pagliacci, I, 262  
Pelléas and Mélisande, 283  
Puritani, I, 118  
Rigoletto, 75  
Robert le Diable, 166  
Romeo and Juliet, 47  
Samson and Delilah, 276  
Sonnambula, La, 114  
Tosca, La, 236  
Traviata, La, 82  
Trovatore, Il, 78  
William Tell, 101  
Zampa, 62





# FAVOURITE OPERAS

## MOZART'S MASTER-WORKS

### THE COMPOSER

THE main facts of Mozart's life are generally familiar. Born at Salzburg in January 1756, he startled the musical world as an infant prodigy, playing the clavier and composing little pieces before he was five. When only six, he was taken on tour by his father, and astonished everybody by his marvellous powers at the keyboard. He came to London in 1764, when he was eight ; played in public and before George III. and his Queen. To the Queen he dedicated six sonatas, and got fifty guineas for them. Advertisements invited people to put the talents of the "wonderful boy" to the proof by giving him anything to play at sight, or any theme upon which to extemporise. Probably it was the feverish excitement of these juvenile "exhibitions" which undermined his constitution, and helped to bring about his early death.

By the time he was fourteen, Mozart was supposed to have mastered the technique of his art. Then he

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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proceeded to Italy. The Italians were amazed at his genius. He played so magnificently at Naples that the audience declared the ring on his finger must be a talisman, and demanded its removal. He removed it, and—played better than ever. Such youthful triumphs are unique in musical biography.

In 1777 Mozart went to Paris with his mother, intending to make it his future residence. But his mother died, and he did not like the French, whom he described as “donkeys.” He said their language must have been invented by the devil, and that they could not sing, only scream. So, in 1779, he returned to Germany. He settled first at Mannheim, where, as he wrote to his father, he had only one room, “quite crammed with a piano, a table, a bed, and a chest of drawers.” Lack of money pinched him. Yet he must have a wife!

The lady, Constance Weber, was a niece of the composer of “Der Freischütz.” Mozart told his father that she had “a pair of bright, black eyes and a pretty figure”; that she was “kind-hearted, clever, modest, good-tempered, economical, neat”; that she “dressed her own hair, understood housekeeping, and had the best heart in the world.” The wedding took place in 1782, at St. Stephen’s, Vienna, where Haydn was married (to a shrew) twenty-two years before. Mozart was perfectly happy with his Constance, but she was a bad manager; and he, soaring far above mundane things, was in a perpetual worry

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## THE COMPOSER

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of pecuniary embarrassments. A friend called one winter day and found the pair waltzing round the room. "We were cold," they explained, "and have no wood to make a fire." Think of it, and then think of the glorious works Mozart produced under such depressing conditions.

Mozart's marriage was coincident with his serious start as a composer. An empty purse is a fine source of inspiration. With a wife and a young family growing up, Mozart had to exert himself. He made his home in Vienna, and set out on a career of creative industry which soon broke him down, and sent him to a premature grave. He poured forth symphonies, operas, sonatas, and other things with staggering prodigality. Day after day and night after night he hardly snatched an hour's rest. To these years belong his greatest works, the operas of "Don Giovanni," "Figaro," and "The Magic Flute," a noble trio. He wrote several other operas, each of which contains some of his best music, but only the three master-works just named have held their place to the present day.

Mozart got very little for his operas—only £20 for "Don Giovanni"—and very little for his other compositions. Hence, he was always poor. He sought by frequent tours to recruit his finances, but the results were disappointing. There are pathetic stories of his pawning gifts showered on him to purchase a meal. The public bestowed their huzzas,

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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which cost nothing, and withheld their gold. Thus he struggled on, the wolf always at the door.

In 1791 he entered on his thirty-sixth and last year. He became weak and ill, silent and melancholy. A commission for a Requiem preyed on his mind. "I well know I am writing this Requiem for myself," he said. The foreboding was realised. He died on December 5, 1791; and when they came to bury him, a poor, scanty, straggling procession accompanied the coffin from the house to the Cathedral. A thunderstorm, with a deluge of rain, broke out before the service was over; and when the coffin emerged the so-called mourners had fled. And thus, unattended except by hirelings, the body of this immortal master was laid with paupers in a common grave, the site of which is now as unknown as that of the grave of Moses.

### "DON GIOVANNI"

The libretto of "Don Giovanni" was adapted by Lorenzo da Ponte (a talented Jew who had the whim of passing for a priest) from a Spanish tale already used by Molière. While marked by many and varied phases of human passion, it is not very dramatically coherent. But the individual characters stand out well, and the supernatural part of the story is very skilfully managed.

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## “DON GIOVANNI”

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The curtain rises on the Commandant's palace at Seville. Don Giovanni, a libertine nobleman, has been trying to carry off Donna Anna, the Commandant's daughter. Anna resists, and Giovanni emerges from the palace, pursued by Anna, calling loudly to have him punished for his insult. Her father rushes to her assistance and is killed by the Don. In the next scene a grief-stricken lady enters. Giovanni, seeking to console her, finds she is his own neglected wife, Donna Elvira. She upbraids him with past infidelity, but he slips away, and Leporello, his servant, is left to disclose the long catalogue of his master's conquests. The following scene is in the country, at Giovanni's palace. Zerlina, a peasant girl, and Masetto are about to be married. Giovanni enters and succeeds in parting Zerlina from her betrothed. Making love to Zerlina, he is overheard by his wife and exposed by her. Masetto taxes Zerlina with faithlessness, but has his suspicions temporarily allayed by Giovanni, who invites the pair to a ball. Giovanni, dancing with Zerlina, entices her from the ball-room, when confusion is produced by her shrieks. Giovanni vainly tries to fix the offence on Leporello.

In the Second Act Leporello and his master are discovered in front of Elvira's house. Giovanni, now enamoured of Elvira's maid, gets Leporello to change garments with him. He then addresses Elvira in accents of repentant love, and owing to

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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the disguise, is able to pass her over to Leporello, while he looks after the maid. Masetto, accompanied by other peasants, enters, and believing Giovanni to be Leporello, asks for the whereabouts of his master, whom they wish to kill. He directs them to the path which Leporello and Elvira have just taken. Giovanni, by a ruse, succeeds in disarming Masetto, and then beats him unmercifully. Leporello narrowly escapes severe handling, being taken for his master.

The next scene is a cemetery, with an equestrian statue of the dead Commandant. Giovanni and Leporello are conversing together, when the statue speaks, warning Giovanni that his end is near. Giovanni, unappalled, invites the statue to supper, and the invitation is accepted. The scene changes for the supper. Elvira makes a final but unavailing appeal to her husband to alter his vicious mode of life. A cry is heard, and the terrified Leporello announces the arrival of the statue. The spectre grasps the hand of the Don; an icy chill runs through his frame, and he awakes to a knowledge of the doom that awaits him. He refuses to repent, and sinks into a flaming abyss which suddenly opens beneath him.

“Don Giovanni” is Mozart’s greatest opera. Gounod, the composer of “Faust,” admired it so much that he wrote a long “commentary” on it. Extolling it as “that unequalled and immortal

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## “DON GIOVANNI”

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masterpiece, that apogee of the lyrical drama,” he declares that it “has exercised the influence of a revelation upon the whole of my life; it has been and remains for me a kind of incarnation of dramatic and musical infallibility. I regard it as a work without blemish, of uninterrupted perfection, and this commentary is but the humble testimony of my veneration and gratitude to the genius to whom I owe the purest and most permanent joys of my life as a musician.” Readers might do well to remember this when listening to Gounod’s own masterpiece.

The main thing to remark about the music is the incomparable skill with which Mozart has displayed all the varied moods and situations arising out of the story. Every character stands out in the musical picture. As Pohl, his biographer, says, there is scarcely a feeling known to humanity which is not expressed in some one of the situations or characters, male and female. “Whether we regard the mixture of passions in its concerted music, the profound expression of melancholy, the variety of its situations, the beauty of its accompaniment, or the grandeur of its heightening and protracted scene of terror—the finale of the Second Act—‘Don Giovanni’ stands alone in dramatic eminence. Of all musical romances it is certainly the first.” Every listener must be struck with the intensely expressive melodies in which the work abounds—melodies such as “Batti, Batti,” and “Vedrai Carino,” and Leporello’s “Cata-

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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logue" aria. It is much to be regretted that the opera is not oftener heard. Perhaps its cast is too exacting for the modern manager, since it demands three great sopranos, a basso, and a powerful baritone.

Mozart would probably have settled in England but for the success of "Don Giovanni." In the spring of 1787 there was an arrangement that he would follow his pupil Attwood and other English friends to London if they procured him a suitable post. But he became so engrossed with "Giovanni" that he forgot all about his intention. And then followed the first performance at the Landes Theater of Prague, on October 29, 1787. Mozart loved the Bohemian capital, for he found there the audiences who most honoured and appreciated him. He had been working on the opera up to the last moment; and, indeed, the Overture was not touched until close on the performance. He told his wife that he would write it during the night if she would sit up with him and provide him with small talk and—punch. The punch made him sleepy, and he lay down on the sofa for two hours. He started again at 5 A.M. At 7 the Overture was finished and in the hands of the copyist.

The copyist had barely time to write out the parts before the beginning of the opera; and, of course, the Overture had to be played by the orchestra at sight. But the players did so well that Mozart, who conducted at the piano, whispered to them:



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## “THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO”

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“Some of the notes fell under the desks, but the Overture went capitally on the whole.” There was an enormous audience, and the applause, cordial from the first, was towards the end renewed with increased enthusiasm. Later, when the opera was produced at Vienna, it was not a success, whether owing to cabals against Mozart, or badness of performance, or some other mysterious reason. It was not until some years had gone by that it won its way into general public favour.

### “THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO”

Mozart set to work on “Figaro” in 1785, having at this date been ordered by the Emperor Joseph to write an opera for Vienna. Da Ponte was again the librettist, founding his text on Beaumarchais’ famous comedy, “Le Mariage de Figaro,” which had lately been creating a stir in Paris. The opera has no regular, well-defined plot. It is rather a succession of awkward and humorous situations, calling forth an abundance of sparkling repartee. The imbroglio is “often exceedingly difficult”; but while not easy to make clear in writing, it is easy enough to follow on the stage.

The scene is laid at the country-house of Count Almaviva, the character in whom the chief amusement of the opera centres. With accommodating

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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notions of morality himself, he is very jealous of the conduct of his Countess, whom he suspects of being rather too fond of an over-grown page, Cherubino. The Count is carrying on a flirtation with Susanna, the Countess's maid; and the drolleries of the opera hang to a large extent on the incidents thus afforded. Susanna is about to be married to Figaro, the Count's valet; but the Count offers her a dowry if she will meet him that evening. She declines, and Figaro presently appears, requesting the Count to honour his marriage by giving away the bride. The Count agrees, but delays the ceremony in order to renew his suit with Susanna.

Meanwhile, Susanna has joined with the Countess and Figaro in a plot to discomfit the Count. An anonymous letter, written by Figaro, tells the Count of certain assignations which have been made for the evening in the garden. Various diverting *contre-temps* arise out of this plot; and further hilarity is created when Bartolo and Marcellina, an aged couple, enter. Bartolo had been rejected by Susanna, and Marcellina had been unable to excite the tender passion in Figaro. But Figaro had promised to marry Marcellina if he failed to repay her an old debt within a certain time; and the payment not having been made, she now comes to claim her bridegroom. The Count, delighted at this turn of affairs, promises that she shall get her rights.

The Second Act is "mainly devoted to clearing

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## “THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO”

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up the various difficulties.” It turns out that Figaro is the long-lost son of Bartolo and Marcellina. Then, in continuance of the plot above mentioned, the Countess disguises herself as Susanna, and at the place of assignation the Count ardently avows his passion to his own wife. He discovers his mistake and promises amendment, and he and the Countess mutually forgive each other their little flirtations. Figaro weds Susanna, and “all’s well that ends well.”

Da Ponte declared that Mozart wrote the whole of “Figaro” in six weeks. Mozart’s note-books hardly bear this out, but at any rate the time occupied was very short. In the score we admire the spontaneous growth and continuity of the whole organism, the psychological truth and depth of sentiment which make the individual characters so life-like; and, resulting from these, the striking harmony in the use of means and forms, and the mixture of dignity and grace, all founded on something higher than mere sensuous beauty. While listening, “we feel the throbbing of our own life-blood, recognise the language of our own hearts, and are captivated by the irresistible charm of unfading beauty: it is art, genuine, immortal, making us free and happy.” Mozart never excelled the melodic beauty of some of the numbers. What could be finer than the Countess’s aria, “Dove sono”; Cherubino’s “Voi che sapete”; or Figaro’s duet with

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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Susanna? The verve and brightness of the music force themselves on the pleased attention throughout; and when all is over, so true is the picture, that, as Mr. Streatfeild says, one comes away with a feeling of having assisted in an actual scene in real life. Such music can never grow old, though modern realism may demand something different.

The opera was brought out on May 1, 1786, in face of the most elaborate intrigues against it, and was received with the attention it deserved. Even at the rehearsal its success was most decided; when, according to Michael Kelly (an Irish tenor who was in the cast under the name of "Signor Ochelly"), the enthusiasm of singers and orchestra rose to fever heat. Kelly says: "I remember that at the first rehearsal of the full band Mozart was on the stage, with his crimson pelisse and gold-banded cocked hat, giving the time of the music to the orchestra. I shall never forget the little animated countenance when lighted up with the glowing rays of genius. It is as impossible to describe it as it would be to paint sunbeams."

He goes on to tell how at one point, "those in the orchestra I thought would never have ceased applauding by beating the bows of their violins against the music desks. The little man acknowledged by repeated obeisances his thanks for those distinguishing marks of enthusiastic applause bestowed upon him." This was at the rehearsal.

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## “THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO”

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At the public performance the furore was equally remarkable. All the principal numbers were re-demanded. Indeed, so numerous were the encores that the performance lasted nearly twice the time that had been calculated upon. The success, too, of the first night was maintained at subsequent representations.

At the second performance, one duet had to be sung three times. So trying, in fact, did the encores become, that the Emperor forbade them for the future. Kelly recounts how Joseph II., after issuing this order, spoke to some of the leading artists on the subject. “I daresay,” he said, “you are pleased at my having put a stop to encores. It must be fatiguing to you to repeat so many songs.” The artists obsequiously signified their agreement. But Kelly, who was standing by, boldly said to the Emperor: “Do not believe them, sire; they all like to be encored. At least, I am sure I always do.” And Kelly was right; for what singer does not welcome the compliment of an encore? Soon afterwards, the opera was given at Prague, where its reception was even more enthusiastic. “The one subject of conversation,” wrote Mozart to his father, “is ‘Figaro’; nothing is played, whistled, or sung but ‘Figaro’; nobody goes to any opera but ‘Figaro’; everlastingly ‘Figaro.’” And we have so few chances of going to “Figaro” now!

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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### “THE MAGIC FLUTE”

This was Mozart's last opera. It was produced at Vienna on September 30, 1791, and on December 5 the master passed away. He wrote it to oblige his old friend Schickaneder, the theatre manager, who prepared the libretto, and who requited the favour by selling the score to other managers, contrary to a promise made to the composer. The text is disjointed, and full of improbabilities and absurdities. Yet it is undeniably adapted for the stage. Goethe, who admitted its inanities, and himself contemplated a continuation of the libretto, declared that “the author had the most perfect knowledge of the art of contrast and a wonderful knack of introducing stage effects.”

It was at first founded on a fable by Wieland, but had to be altered when the same plot appeared in a rival contemporary play. Moreover, it was arranged to display some of the manager's old stage properties. Under these conditions it could hardly be expected that “The Magic Flute” would attain the high level of the two Da Ponte plays. Another consideration which should be noticed has militated against its continued popularity. The signs of Freemasonry in the libretto are not much observed now, but they demand attention for the proper under-

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## “THE MAGIC FLUTE”

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standing of the work. In 1791 the Emperor Leopold had opposed the Freemasons, so that the public followed allusions to that craft which have now lost their special point and meaning. Ferdinand David said that no one who was not a Freemason could thoroughly appreciate the opera; and he instanced the grand chords played by the trombones at the end of the first part of the Overture and in the first scene in the Second Act: “a symbol which no Freemason could possibly fail to understand.” Mozart himself was a Freemason, and so was his librettist.

The story is based on circumstances connected with the mysterious worship of Isis, the deity of the ancient Egyptians. Its action is consequent upon Sarastro, the high priest of the Temple of Isis, having borne away Pamina, the daughter of Astrifiamante, the wicked Queen of Night, from her mother in order that she may be trained in the ways of virtue and wisdom. Tamino, a handsome Egyptian prince, is saved from a monstrous serpent by the Queen’s servants. They show him a portrait of Pamina, and he falls in love with the unknown original. He is told the story of her having been stolen by Sarastro, and he vows to rescue her.

Before starting he is presented with a magic flute, by which he is enabled to give alarm and invoke assistance in cases of peril; while Papageno, the silly bird-catcher, who accompanies him, is furnished with

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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certain musical instruments which, when played, transform anger into mirth and provoke a desire for dancing. Developments need not be detailed. It is only necessary to say that Tamino, instead of bringing back Pamina, becomes a novice in the Temple; meets Pamina there; goes through, like her, a severe testing probation; is ultimately proved worthy, and marries Pamina, while his companion Papageno also finds a mate.

“The Magic Flute,” like its predecessors, is true to nature from the first note to the last, and the hand of the master is as clearly discernible in the tinkle of Papageno’s *glockenspiel* as in the grandest contrapuntal triumph of the last finale. Objection has sometimes been taken to the florid passages of the Queen of Night’s aria, “*Gli angui d’inferno*,” as being opposed to sense and good taste. A French critic is probably right, however, in his opinion that Mozart did not write these passages for mere display, but that he had a dramatic intention, namely by them, and especially by the high notes, to give to the Queen *une intensité fantastique*. Beethoven is said to have considered this Mozart’s greatest opera, because in it were to be found nearly every species of music from the lied to the chorale and fugue.

The opera was such a success after its first production in September 1791, that by October 12, 1795, it had been performed no fewer than two hundred times. It was first staged in Paris, where it has recently



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## “THE MAGIC FLUTE”

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been revived, in 1801, and in London in 1811. Though it was given by the students of the Royal College of Music, under the direction of Sir Charles Stanford, at the Lyceum in 1899, there has been no public performance in London since 1892—at the Olympic Theatre, under Lago's management. The neglect is no doubt due in a measure to the causes already suggested; but more particularly perhaps to the fact that special singers are required for the Queen of Night and Sarastro arias. Mme. Tetrazzini is probably the only living artist who could do full vocal justice to the rôle of the Queen.

# BEETHOVEN'S "FIDELIO"

## THE COMPOSER

MOZART'S success with opera incited a host of imitators; but of that period only Beethoven's "Fidelio," still occasionally heard, has survived. The details of Beethoven's life, like those of Mozart's, are familiar. The composer came of a musical family; for his grandfather was a kapellmeister, and his father, a tenor singer, filled a small musical post at Cologne. He was born at Bonn in December 1770. His father had become a confirmed toper, and the boy suffered in consequence. The father had heard of the prodigy Mozart, and the money *he* had brought his parents; and he conceived the notion of exploiting his own son in the same way. Thus he kept him slaving at the piano, and thrashed him when he did not practise long enough. There are stories of the sot coming home late and dragging the little fellow out of bed to go to the keyboard. This degraded specimen ended his life by his own hand, but not before his conduct had cast a gloom over his son's youth which greatly affected his after years.

Beethoven seems to have had no regular course

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## THE COMPOSER

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of instruction in Bonn, but when he was seventeen he went to Vienna and had some lessons from Mozart. Later on, he had lessons from Haydn; but the two did not get on well together, their natures being totally different. Beethoven finally left Bonn when he was twenty-two, and settled in Vienna, where he gradually made a name for himself. He began to appear in public as a player, and in 1796 played before the King in Berlin; but he soon gave up playing for composing.

His first works were roundly abused by the critics—even some that we now regard as among his greatest creations. Weber said of the Seventh Symphony that its composer was “quite ripe for the madhouse.” Then, when deafness came upon him—the tragedy of his life—the sapient fellows found that the “horrors of sound” in his works were due to the fact that he could not hear them himself. When “Fidelio” was first performed, it was said that never before had anything so incoherent, coarse, wild, and ear-splitting been heard! Of course, the deafness had nothing to do with it. Beethoven, like all really great composers, was simply before his time.

But the deafness had a great deal to do with Beethoven himself. It turned him into a wretched misanthrope, and well-nigh caused him to end his life. Indirectly it prevented him from marrying. He got a special kind of piano constructed, with

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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extra strings and a resonator, and on this he would thrash out in a wild way the themes that were always coursing through his brain. In the theatre he had to lay his ears close to the orchestra in order to understand the actors, and the higher notes of the instruments and voices he could not hear at all when only a little distance away. "Fidelio" was begun in 1804, and the affliction, first evidenced in 1798, had become acute four years before that. We need not dwell on it. In all musical biography there is nothing so terrible to read about as Beethoven's deafness. "If I were of any *other* profession!" he used to wail.

From the time of his deafness onwards, he was constantly adding to the world's stores of the best in music. But he was unhappy and worried all the while. Wagner said of him that he faced the world with an almost defiant temperament, and kept an almost savage independence. He was in perpetual trouble about lodgings and servants. "The cook's off again," was a frequent piece of domestic information to his friends. Once he determined to be cook himself, and sent out invitations to share in one of his efforts. Those who came—well, like Poe's raven, their verdict was "nevermore." He was absent-minded to a degree; he had a volcanic temper, which more than once led to his flinging the inkstand among the piano-wires. Once he threw a dish of stewed beef and gravy in a waiter's face because the

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## “ F I D E L I O ”

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dish was not what he had ordered, and one of his cooks was punished for the staleness of the eggs by having the whole batch, one by one, discharged at her head.

His humour was of the sardonic kind, as when he sent a tuft of hair from a goat's beard to a lady admirer, who had asked for a strand from his own leonine locks. When lying on his death-bed he had to be tapped. “ Better water from the body than from the pen,” he observed to the doctor. When he realised that his end was near, he said to those around him: “ Clap hands, friends ; the play is over.” And so, on the 26th of March 1827, this great master of tone went out to the darkness of the Silent Land.

## “ F I D E L I O ”

This was the only opera written by Beethoven, whose genius was symphonic rather than dramatic. He had long been anxious to try his powers on an opera, and had even accepted engagements from managers, but these had all fallen through. He would not have a silly, commonplace libretto: he must have something of a noble kind. At last, having received a commission from the manager of the Theater An-der-Wien, he fixed upon a story of brave and unconquerable womanly devotion, and set to work on it with his whole heart and soul. He

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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laboured at it incessantly, and identified himself so completely with its progress that he seemed as much at home in it as he had ever been in sonata or symphony.

The subject of the opera was derived from Bouilly's "Leonore; or, Conjugal Love." It had already been used for a French opera comique, as well as for an opera, to Italian words, by Paër, a composer who accompanied Napoleon to Warsaw and Posen, and in 1807 was formally installed as his *maître de chapelle*. Indeed, it was a performance of Paër's work which suggested "Fidelio" to Beethoven, who had a German translation prepared.

The leading incident in the plot—the rescue of an unjustly detained prisoner through the devotion of a friend whose life is risked but not lost—corresponds with that of three operas by Cherubini, whom Beethoven called "the greatest of all living writers for the stage." It is a simple plot, but lofty in design and exhibiting a purity of motive not usually found in opera texts.

Pizarro, the governor of a State prison in Spain, entertaining a bitter enmity against Don Florestan, a nobleman, seizes and confines him in a loathsome dungeon with the intention of starving him to death. Florestan's faithful wife, Leonora, disguises herself in male attire, and under the name of Fidelio obtains admission to the prison as servant to Rocco, the head warder. Pizarro, having been informed of the

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## “ F I D E L I O ”

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approaching visit of the Minister Ferdinand, on a tour of inspection, tries to persuade Rocco to kill Florestan. Rocco, while refusing, agrees to dig his grave if Pizarro will himself commit the murder.

Leonora, partially overhearing their plans, takes advantage of the passion with which, as a boy, she has inspired the warder's daughter, Marcelline (who is affianced to Jaquino the porter), and thinking that Florestan's life may be the one intended to be sacrificed, persuades Rocco to let her accompany him to the dungeon as an assistant. On entering the cell, Leonora immediately knows her husband by his voice, but conceals her emotion and helps Rocco to prepare the grave. When all is ready, Pizarro descends to the dungeon and attempts to stab his prisoner. But Leonora, declaring herself Florestan's wife, resolutely throws herself between them. Pizarro, in defeated rage, is about to sacrifice both to his fury, when Leonora draws a pistol and defies him. At this moment the arrival of the Minister Ferdinand is heralded by a flourish of trumpets. Pizarro hurries away to receive his superior, and husband and wife rush into each other's arms. The deeply-laid plot is divulged to the Minister, who orders Pizarro to be deposed, and rewards the devotion of Leonora by bidding her with her own hands remove her husband's chains and restore him to liberty.

Beethoven wrote “Fidelio” in the full maturity of his creative powers, and it stands alone among

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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operas, with great and peculiar qualities of its own. Its general style is serious and lofty, and strongly dramatic. Like "The Magic Flute," it bears traces of the old German "Singspiele" (a sort of popular vaudeville copiously sprinkled with songs) in its snatches of spoken dialogue; but these, when rightly uttered, can easily be made to emphasise the emotions produced by the music. "So far from suggesting any feeling of anti-climax, the sudden relapse into agitated speech often gives an effect more thrilling than any music could command," says Mr. Streatfeild. For the rest, one has to admit that the many well-known numbers in the opera seem to find more favour in the concert-room than on the stage.

"Fidelio" was first performed at the Kaerntnerthor Theatre, Vienna, on November 20, 1805. The rehearsals had been attended with extraordinary difficulties, especially in regard to the singers. They complained that portions of the work were unsingable, but Beethoven, with his usual obstinacy, declined to make any concessions. He had trouble also with the band. Writing only two days before the public performance, he says: "Pray try to persuade Seyfried to conduct my opera to-day, as I wish to see and hear it from a distance; in this way at least my patience will not be so severely tried by the rehearsal as when I am close enough to hear my music bungled." This was one advantage of his deafness! "I really do believe it is done on pur-



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## “ F I D E L I O ”

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pose,” he continues. “ All *pp.*, *cresc.*, all *decresc.*, and *f.*, *ff.*, may as well be struck out of my music, since not one of them is attended to. I lose all desire to write anything more if my music is to be so played.” To another friend he wrote that “ the whole business of the opera is the most distressing thing in the world.”

The circumstances of the first performance were also unfavourable, for the French army had only seven days before invaded Vienna, and the chief nobility and other wealthy patrons of music had deserted the town. Three performances were given, and the opera was then withdrawn by the composer himself. It was given again in 1806, with extensive alterations and a new overture, but its success was still doubtful. There was a revival in 1814, with further alterations and a new Overture in E, the fourth which had been written for it. On this occasion its beauties were better appreciated, but never during Beethoven's lifetime was “ Fidelio ” understood as it came to be later. Weber once brought it out at Prague, when, to his disgust, it was coldly received. “ Punch and Judy would suit them better,” he said. It is to be regretted that we do not hear it more frequently now, especially as for its efficient representation there is only needed some half-dozen leading singers, a chorus, an ordinary orchestra, and a couple of scenes such as any provincial theatre could provide at a few hours' notice.

## GOUNOD'S "FAUST" AND "ROMEO"

### THE COMPOSER

CHARLES FRANÇOIS GOUNOD was born in Paris in 1818, and died there in 1893. He was a pupil of the Paris Conservatoire, where he won the *Prix de Rome*, the greatest musical prize the world offers. This meant a three years' stay in Rome for musical study, and that again meant, for Gounod, the fostering of a powerful religious sentiment. After the severe apprenticeship, he returned to Paris and became master of the choristers and organist of the Church of the Foreign Missions. For the nonce he seemed entirely absorbed in the Church. The same streak of mysticism was paralleled in the life of the young Liszt, who was acutely seized with the doctrines of St. Simon. Like Liszt, Gounod came dangerously near entering upon a monastic life at the very outset of his career. He did, in fact, take a two years' course in theology, and one can still see "Abbé Gounod" printed as the designation of the composer on some of his music. Finally he came to the conclusion that he had not the proper "vocation," and what the Church lost, music gained. The religious fervour returned to him in his old age, when

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## THE COMPOSER

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he produced the great and now unjustly neglected oratorio, "The Redemption" (for the copyright of which Novello paid him the unprecedented sum of £1000), and the ponderous "Mors et Vita." He declared himself that the most powerful musical influence of his career was his first hearing of Mozart's "Don Giovanni." His opinion of that immortal work has already been quoted. Gounod regarded Mozart as the greatest of all composers, though he once called Beethoven's Ninth Symphony the Bible of musicians.

His earlier operas failed entirely, and this temporarily drove him back to sacred composition. "Faust," however, written when he was forty, changed all that. Not remarkably successful at first, as we shall see, it grew steadily in public favour until now its only rivals are Wagner's "Tannhäuser" (perhaps "Lohengrin") and Bizet's "Carmen." His other operas, with the single exception of "Romeo and Juliet," have not enjoyed any measure of popularity. Several of them, indeed, are as dead as Queen Anne, though some ought not to be. "Mireille," for instance, is a work full of charm and poetry that has met with less favour than it deserves.

In England, apart from the two great works on which his fame and influence as a composer of opera will rest, Gounod has been known chiefly for his songs, particularly for semi-sacred songs of the "Nazareth" type, and for the ever-popular Bach-

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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Gounod, "Meditation." In all the countries of Europe he is known by his "Faust."

### "FAUST"

#### "FAUST" IN MUSIC AND LITERATURE

Many versions of the Faust legend exist, but only two count as literature—those of Christopher Marlowe and Goethe. Goethe's is the incomparable creation. The spell of the ancient apologue laid hold of him before he was well out of his teens. "The marionette fable of Faust," he says, "murmured with many voices in my soul. I, too, had wandered into every department of knowledge, and had returned early enough satisfied with the vanity of science. And life, too, I had tried under various aspects, and always came back sorrowing and unsatisfied." The first part of his great work was published in 1808, the second in 1831. From it the "Faust" of Gounod, a work equally great in its own way, is essentially derived.

A French statistician has proved that more composers have been inspired by Goethe's master creation than by any other secular piece of literature whatsoever. He gives a list of no fewer than nineteen operas written on the subject, beginning with the 1810 setting of Spohr (a "conscientious work," now forgotten), and ending with the "Faust" of



'While old Mammon leads the ball'

Act II. Sc. 1



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## THE LIBRETTO

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Lassen, produced at Weimar in 1876. To these might be added Berlioz's fantastic *La Damnation de Faust*, Schumann's mystic symphonic work, Liszt's "Faust" symphony, and a "Faust" overture written by Wagner in 1849. It is said that Beethoven thought of crowning his career by a "Faust"—and what a "Faust" that would have been! Rossini, too, had hoped to measure himself with Goethe, and Alexandre Dumas was to have written the words. To opera-goers, however, there is but one "Faust," and it is that which figures in the Frenchman's list as by "Charles Gounod, Paris, 1859."

## THE LIBRETTO

No composer could hope to deal with the entire Faust legend as it is enshrined in Goethe's vast and complex conception. One composer will fix on this, another will fix on that, according as his genius and his personal fancy dictate. Gounod and his librettists fixed on the single episode of Gretchen, as illustrating the eternal legend of love, its allurements, betrayals, ardours, and tortures, and practically discarded the rest of the mighty drama. The fantastic element was purposely, and rightly, subordinated to the human. In Madame de Bovet's "Life of Gounod" there is a very interesting passage giving, in effect, the result of a conversation which the writer had with Jules

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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Barbier, the chief librettist. What in his eyes, we gather, made this particular episode of "Faust" the paragon of dramatic plots was its simplicity and its very ordinary action, which is the only eternal one.

It is the drama of the heart which, since the beginning of the world, has been enacted between three characters, the man, the woman, and the devil; the last being the personification of original sin, if we use the Christian phraseology, or to place the question on freer ground, of passion implanted by nature in the heart and senses of the two other ones. The man attracted to the woman by the strength of desire; the woman falling into his arms under the impulse of the Satanic tempter; the selfishness of the one, the self-abnegation of the other, are the elements of the drama. The idealisation, the transfiguration by love of a lowly being—for Margaret is but a serving-wench, says M. Barbier, with a roughness of expression which is strictly true—is the second; the third is the purification by suffering of a soul stained by the baseness of humanity.

The subject is sufficiently grand. Who will seriously affirm, the objectors notwithstanding, that it would be improved by additional philosophical developments in which poetry might be submerged and music wrecked, or by the fanciful additions which after all are manipulations rather than inspirations and more ostentatious than valuable? Gounod's librettists made no pretensions to high literary skill, but they knew what was required of them. Their task was to adapt Goethe's work to the requirements of lyric drama, and they performed the task with equal taste and intelligence. "A well-constructed



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## THE LIBRETTO

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and thoroughly comprehensible libretto, with plenty of love-making and floods of cheap sentiment," is the verdict of one who may claim to speak as an authority. Let us see, then, what the story exactly is as it unwinds itself in association with Gounod's music.

ACT 1.—On the soul of Faust has fallen a mood of deep depression. We see him seated in his study, sick to death of the learned lore he has been pursuing, weary and disillusioned of the pettiness and the triviality of life; ready to "take arms" against himself and end it all by the poison which has stood forgotten on his shelf for years. He is just about to raise the vial to his lips when the distant chorus of the angels breaks on his ear. Softer and better thoughts come back to him, and he drops the fatal draught. But melancholy soon supervenes. In despair he invokes the aid of the infernal powers. Somewhat to his surprise, Mephistopheles, the embodiment of the Evil One, promptly appears, arrayed in the garb of a travelling student, which is presently replaced by the scarlet dress and cap with the cock's feather so familiar to us on the stage. The Evil One promises to endow Faust with all sorts of good fortune—with youth, and elegance of form, and fine adornments, and love, and a host of other things—if only Faust will give himself, body and soul, in exchange. To hasten his decision, the tempter shows Faust, as an earnest of future "favours," a mirror-vision of the lovely village maiden, seated at

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## F A V O U R I T E O P E R A S

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her spinning-wheel, who is to play such a tragic part in his history. Margaret's charms take complete possession of Faust's heart, and, with his own blood, he signs the contract drawn by the Prince of Darkness. After drinking a magic philtre which endows him with youth and beauty and splendid attire, he hurries away with his demon-companion, and the Act closes.

ACT 2.—In this Act we find that Mephistopheles has carried Faust to a Kermesse in the market-place of a country town. Valentine now goes off to the wars, distressed at leaving, "alone and young," his sister Margaret. His friend Siebel, a boyish admirer, promises to "guard her like a brother." Valentine leaves her, however, to the care of Dame Martha, a kindly, but vulgar, commonplace woman, who proves a by no means vigilant person. Faust now pleads with Mephistopheles to see Margaret, "that darling child whom I saw in a dream." Mephistopheles agrees to his request; and so, during a break in the dances, Faust is enabled to salute Margaret for the first time as she returns from church. He offers her his escort, which she declines; whereupon Mephistopheles observes that he must teach Faust how to woo, and the dance is resumed.

ACT 3.—This Act takes place in Margaret's garden. Siebel has left a floral offering for Margaret. Faust and Mephistopheles enter secretly and place "something a little rarer, to adorn a too willing wearer,"



'For ever!'  
Act III. Sc. 1



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## THE LIBRETTO

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namely, a casket of jewels, on the doorstep. The beauty of the jewels overcomes her woman's weakness. As Mephistopheles says, "If yonder flowers this casket do outshine, never will I trust a woman more." Never in her sleep did Margaret dream of anything so lovely. She cannot resist putting on the jewels. Faust and Mephistopheles find her adorned with them, and while Mephistopheles keeps Martha, the convenient neighbour in whose house Margaret is often found, out of the way, Faust passionately pleads his love with Margaret. The Act ends by Margaret "yielding to Faust's prayers and entreaties," as the euphemism is. In plain terms, Margaret has lost her virtue.

ACT 4.—We now see Margaret left alone, disconsolate, shunned by her friends, haunted by remorse. Faust has thrown her aside. He has, however, to reckon with Valentine, who returns from his military service to learn, from the scandal of the town, of his sister's love affair. His sister has been his pride, and he must be revenged. Discovering, in the grey of the morning, the false Faust skulking under Margaret's window, he challenges the seducer to a duel. The white blades cross in the faint light. Faust's Satanic second lends strength to his arm, and Valentine falls. He dies in Margaret's arms, denouncing her secret guilt to the crowd that has gathered around. It is during this Act that the "church scene" occurs—sometimes performed after

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## F A V O U R I T E O P E R A S

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Valentine's death, sometimes before it. Margaret is on her knees in the dim religious light of the minster, striving to direct her thoughts in prayer, a guilty conscience stifling her half-formed utterances. The madness of love has passed; the pain of betrayal has cooled the ardour of passion, leaving the soul of Margaret crushed under the weight of sin, tortured by regret and remorse. She is forsaken by the Deity so that she may wash the stain of her guilt in the waters of repentance. The "gentle creature," as the poem calls her, struggles against the demon bent on his prey.

ACT 5.—Margaret's reason is unseated; grief has driven her insane. In her frenzy she has murdered her babe. She is thrown into prison, condemned to death. Faust, aided by Mephistopheles, finds her there, and urges her to fly with him. Weak as she is in every sense, she refuses, and in an excess of agony and grief expires, passionately imploring pardon. Nothing can go beyond this scene in pathos and truth to nature. Ophelia alone compares with Gretchen in her last hour of trial. When the Evil One is fiendishly gloating over the consummation of the wretched catastrophe, celestial voices are suddenly heard welcoming the repentant sinner. Then Mephistopheles, startled at the unexpected turn taken in the ill-success of his subtle devices, becomes a suppliant himself, in which posture he figures as Margaret's soul is borne by heavenly messengers to its lasting rest.

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## THE LIBRETTO

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Such, in barest outline, is the story—a story probably the most human in interest of any associated with a great opera. It emphasises—if one is serious enough to seek for its meaning—the eternally applicable lesson expressed in the words: “No man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.” The whirlpool of destruction that engulfs Margaret, her babe, and her soldier brother, sets toward Faust as a centre. Through the grand tragedy runs the feeling that sensual pleasure can never satisfy the human soul. But neither—and that again is emphasised by the lonely student Faust in his cell—neither can selfish self-absorption and one-sided development. If a man is to fill his place rightly in the world some ideal he *must* have—Love, Friendship, or Humanity. Carlyle, Goethe’s great disciple, put it all in a nutshell when he said: “Love not pleasure, love God; this is the Everlasting Yea in which whosoever walketh and worketh it is well with him.” If he should walk and work otherwise, better for him, as it had been better for Faust, to drain the fatal beaker at once.

People sometimes ask if there was a real Faust, just as children ask if there was a real Blue Beard. The question is as easily answered in the one case as in the other. The Faust round whom such a wealth of halo and legend has gathered, the “black doctor” whose story assumed literary form before the sixteenth century was out, was an actual per-

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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sonage. He "flourished," as the saying is, about the time that Martin Luther was preaching the Reformation in Germany. Luther, indeed, spoke freely of him as an awful example of the subtlety and wickedness of the devil, and of the prudence of avoiding perilous dealings with him. He can be traced in references of contemporaries from 1507 to 1540. Melancthon, most precise of Reformers, records having conversed with him. Manlius, too, a pupil of Melancthon, tells, in a work of 1562, how Faust had "studied magic at Cracow, worked many vain wonders throughout Germany," and was at last carried off by the enemy of mankind. The doctor is said, in fact, to have entered into a compact with the Prince of Darkness, by which he undertook, in return for twenty-five years' unrestrained enjoyment, to surrender himself entirely at the end of the term to "the party of the second part." According to the traditional tale, the contract was fulfilled with remarkable promptitude in the October of 1538, when Faust, lying at a country inn, was torn to pieces by his spirit friend during the night. His name lived on in tradition and romance until the form of the *mythus* was fixed for all time in the Frankfort *Volksbuch* of 1587. Even yet Dr. Faust and his familiar, Wagner, play a conspicuous part in the puppet-shows of Germany.



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## THE MUSIC

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### THE MUSIC

Shakespeare's is no more the only possible "Hamlet" than Gounod's is the only possible "Faust." Every artist has his crowning *chef-d'œuvre*—Mozart his "Don Giovanni," Handel his "Messiah," Weber his "Freischütz," Meyerbeer his "Huguenots," Bizet his "Carmen," Tschaiakowsky his "Pathetic Symphony." Gounod's *chef-d'œuvre* is "Faust." Before its production he was merely, as a contemporary critic put it, "a distinguished musician, a clever artist, who gave promise of a great composer to France." In "Faust," whatever may be said for his other works, he most assuredly fulfilled the promise.

In a work of this kind it would obviously be out of place to discuss the music in any but the most general terms. What strikes one chiefly is that Gounod has here constructed a pleasant half-way house between the classical and the popular styles. He is not too classical, and he is not too popular. In "Faust" he found himself in his element, and his music appeals with equal force to the trained and the untrained. Even the untrained cannot help remarking his delicate feeling and emotion, his exquisite musical representation of sentiment. The ineffable beauty of many of the scenes is quite

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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enough by way of answer to those who object that "Faust" is in some degree a set of scenes rather than a coherent drama. The scene in the cathedral and the death of Valentine, as even a fastidious American critic has allowed, are not equalled in beauty by anything in the works of any other French composer, and have been excelled perhaps only by Mozart, Wagner, and Verdi. The Ker-messe and the garden scene make two musical pictures of the first rank. The exorcising of Mephistopheles *may* be rather "cheap sentiment," but it never fails of its effect. The Soldiers' Chorus, again, though lacking the dignity of that in "Aïda," is always sure of a warm reception. The vision of Margaret is set with admirable delicacy; Siebel's well-known air, "Paratello d'Amor," is always charming; and if they *are* somewhat thin, the "King of Thule" and the Jewel Song are touching enough. Variety is obtained by the ecclesiastical style of the impressive church scene. The last Act is short, but the grand trio for Faust, Margaret, and Mephistopheles is one of the truly great numbers of the work.

All through, one sees the composer's dramatic sincerity, his earnest search after "the correct and convincing musical embodiment of the emotions of his personages." Note, for example, how the music of Mephistopheles accords with the character of the demon as set forth by the librettists. Gounod was

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## THE MUSIC

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no musical Titan, but neither was he a composer who would write clap-trap for empty display. Every page of "Faust" discovers the lofty ideal which he kept before himself. Commonplace and conventional much of the music may be; but the great majority of us are creatures of the commonplace. The musical pedant may sneer at the love music in the third Act, but the dreamy langour which pervades the scene, the cloying sweetness of the harmonies, the melting beauty of the orchestration, all combine to produce an effect which to the average listener is irresistible. Gounod was above all things a lyrist, a melodist. He had a happy faculty of saying lovely things in a tongue which is intelligible the world over. The human element, the purely romantic, perhaps voluptuous side of love he knew how to picture admirably. He sings of love, and our sympathetic human nature vibrates as he sings. The sweet, sensuous charm of his music appeals to us all, and listening to him we are, for the moment at least, impatient of the objectors who complain that he was not cast in the heroic mould of Beethoven and Wagner.

"Faust" is in reality one of the purest and most beautiful lyric dramas now on the stage, one of the best romantic operas of modern times. As Scudo said, when writing of the first performance in 1859, it is marked by "unfailing distinction of style, perfect tact in details, happy colouring, supreme

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## F A V O U R I T E O P E R A S

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elegance, discreet sobriety in the instrumentation, revealing the hand of a master who has slaked his thirst at pure and sacred springs." Gounod may not have been among the very great of the composers; but how many of the very great could have given us a "Faust" like his?

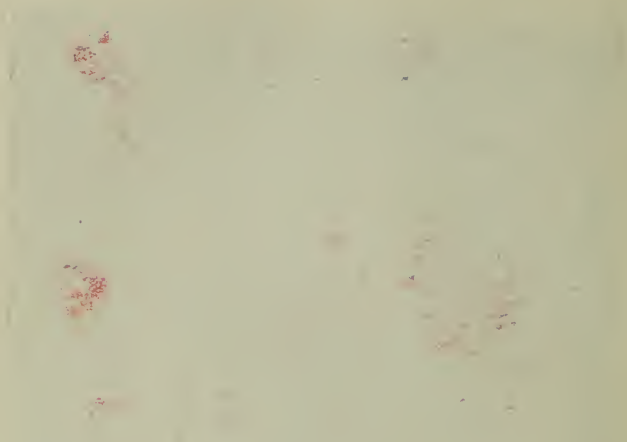
### HISTORY OF THE OPERA

In the matter of the libretto of "Faust" Gounod was fortunate in finding a coadjutor in M. Jules Barbier, one of the most fertile of French dramatic authors. Meeting Gounod one day, Barbier confided to him that he wished to make an opera libretto out of "Faust." Gounod jumped at an idea which he had himself secretly cherished for years, and the collaboration was arranged there and then. Barbier proceeded to discuss the plan with his friend and habitual co-worker, M. Carré, who, curiously enough, had just had a small piece called *Faust et Marguerite* acted at the Gymnase. On this work Carré had probably expended all the courage he possessed. At any rate he accepted with the greatest stolidity the notion which already fired Barbier and Gounod with such enthusiasm. The plot, he said, was worn out; it was too vast; it was not theatrical enough; and so on. Still, though he had no faith in the project, he would take his usual share of the



'No, thou shalt pray no more'

Act IV.



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## HISTORY OF THE OPERA

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collaboration. As it turned out, Carré's share was very limited—just enough, in fact, to enable him to claim to have his name connected with the immortal work. At the end of the year the opera was finished.

Now came the question of finding a manager who would produce it. One after another was tried in vain. Roqueplan, described as the most Parisian, the shrewdest of business men, would have nothing to do with the work. The plot, he averred, was out of date. Imagine a theme of such human interest being ever out of date! Alphonse Reyer succeeded Roqueplan at the Imperial Academy of Music, and to him the manuscript was next submitted. "Not stagey enough," he exclaimed; and again "Faust" went on its travels. At last the manager of the Théâtre Lyrique decided to give the almost despairing artists a chance. Gounod's score pleased him, he was good enough to say. But, alas! the long-deferred hope was still further deferred. A "Faust" by Dennerly intervened, and delayed Gounod's opera for a whole year.

When at length the work was put in rehearsal, it was only to encounter fresh vicissitudes. For many months, as we read in Marie de Bovet's "Life of Gounod," the two librettists, the composer, and the manager, M. Carvalho, met in the latter's office, and strange scenes were exacted sometimes until far into the night. Carvalho was capricious, and day after

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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day altered his mind about this or that. Carré, doubtful of success as he had been from the first, yielded weakly to every whim. Gounod protested, pleaded, threatened, and then yielded too, mainly out of deference to his nervous system, which always got excited by these encounters. Barbier alone held out—fought inch by inch to maintain the integrity of his work. But for him these “epic battles” in the manager’s office might have resulted in a “Faust” very different from that which was finally brought to the test of a public interpretation on the 19th of March 1859. It is told, indeed, that poor Barbier was so prostrated by the wranglings at these nocturnal sittings and by the worries of the rehearsals that he was unable to be present when the great night arrived.

And what, then, was the immediate fate of a work which had involved so much preliminary toil and anxiety? Did Fortune smile on “Faust” that spring night? Alas! its hour of triumph was not yet come. “Decidedly the devil does not bring luck to M. Gounod,” was the significant observation of a cynical “first-nighter.” To say that the opera was a failure would be an exaggeration, but it certainly was not appreciated as it afterwards came to be appreciated. Scudo, of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, prince of music critics, said it had only a waltz and a chorus; Berlioz (but then he was jealous) declared that the composer had not the



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## HISTORY OF THE OPERA

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smallest conception of the subject he sought to treat! A certain Martin d'Angers, thundering in a musical journal, concluded his notice with the hope that Gounod would never repeat the experiment. It was unlikely; masterpieces are not often duplicated. As for the public attitude, that can best be expressed by saying it was not hostile but hesitating. "The most contradictory feelings," writes one, "were manifested with regard to the new work, and opposing tides of opinion stemmed the regular current in one direction or the other." There was no enthusiasm. The Parisians went to the Théâtre Lyrique, but receipts were uncertain and success was slow. Manager Carvalho, convinced of the final triumph of the opera, perseveringly pushed it on to a fifty-seventh performance, at which point he failed and the theatre was closed—a result the import of which does not require to be emphasised.

Meanwhile, the composer had been trying to find a publisher for his score. But the publishers, like the managers, were shy. Nay, they shunned "Faust" as if it were the devil *in propria personâ*. Heugel wanted to print it, declaring that the waltz alone would cover the expense; but Heugel had a partner, and he decided that the firm could not publish a failure. It seemed as if Gounod and his librettists must undertake the printing at their own cost. They had, in fact, almost decided upon that course when the score was shown to one M

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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Choudens, who had just started business. Choudens resolved to risk all his capital on it. He bought "Faust" for 10,000 francs, and laid the foundation of the fortunes of his house. Rarely, indeed, has so hazardous an experiment met with so rich a reward. "Faust" has proved a veritable gold mine for publishers and impresarios alike. In thirty years from the date of Choudens' bold venture, the modest sum he so timidly advanced brought him in nearly three millions of francs, representing an investment at a thousand per cent. The English publishing right, it may be added, is conserved; but, happily for the popularity of the opera, the performing rights in England were lost to the composer.

In this connection, a word or two may be said about the first performance of "Faust" in England. It was at Her Majesty's Theatre on June 12, 1863, and such was the dubiety as to the success of the opera even then that Messrs. Chappell, who had secured the publishing rights in this country for the ridiculous sum of £30 (curiously enough, Gounod received from Messrs. Boosey £800 for his next opera, "Mireille," which was never a success), had to pay Mr. Mapleson £500 to induce him to stage it! The story is succinctly told in both Mr. Kuhe's and Signor Arditì's "Reminiscences." In our days, as Mr. Kuhe observes, whenever, through unforeseen circumstances, it is necessary to substitute for the opera to be performed on a certain evening some other

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## HISTORY OF THE OPERA

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work, the choice of a manager generally lies between "Faust" and "Carmen." In either case he feels that the disappointment of the audience will vanish as soon as the ear is greeted by the strains of Gounod or Bizet. But bold indeed would have been accounted the prophet foretelling in 1863 a success so enduring as that which has fallen to Gounod's great work.

London gave by no means a favourable reception to the opera, though there was a very strong cast, including Titiens, Trebelli, Giuglini, and Santley. Signor Arditi, who was then conductor at Her Majesty's, tells how his orchestra cared so little for the music that he had to encourage them to persevere by the assurance that they would be delighted with it on a more intimate acquaintance. At the performance nothing seemed to take the fancy of the audience but the old men's and the Soldiers' Chorus and the tenor air "Salve Dimora." Signor Schira, who had just had an opera of his own produced at Her Majesty's, was present, and at one part stopped his ears with his hands, exclaiming aloud: "That is execrable. It reminds me of a couple of cats squabbling on the tiles." At the second representation the audience were much less frigid; at the third the turning point on the road to success was reached. Still, the work had many enemies, and encountered a great deal of opposition and unmerited abuse. We have Arditi's word for it that although it was con-

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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stantly repeated, it was not a financial success during the first year.

In the following year, 1864, pay and popularity joined hands in a grip that has "held" ever since. Mario, the great tenor, then figured in the *title-rôle*—in appearance and as an actor an ideal Faust, though vocally Faust was never one of his peerless parts. Probably the very best Faust yet seen, from the point of view of personal appearance as well as vocally and dramatically, is Jean de Reszke, though Nicolini was also superb in the part. Towards the end of the 1864 season Madame Patti appeared as the heroine, when for the first time was heard a Margaret such as Gounod might have dreamed of—perfection of voice, singing, and acting being in the great diva personified. "What a feast it was," exclaims the veteran Kuhe, "to hear the Jewel Song given at length with matchless excellence, and to see associated with the singer such a Faust as Mario looked!" A few years later London opera-goers were sent into raptures by the appearance as Margaret of Christine Nilsson—in looks an ideal Gretchen such as any student of Goethe might picture, and in dramatic intensity equal to any artist who had previously been seen in the *rôle*.

The Margaret of the 1863 London production was, as has been indicated, the famous Titiens, but it was impossible to reconcile her tall and massive figure with the girlishness of an ideal Gretchen,



'Let earth be severe, Heaven is forgiving'

Act V. Sc. 1



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## “ROMEO AND JULIET”

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though it is said that her singing of the passionate music in the church scene and final trio has never been surpassed. In the Paris production of 1859 the Gretchen was Mme. Carvalho, the manager's wife. Her voice was described as “a thin, shrill soprano, as slender as her person, cut in two by three or four hasty notes—a regular bird pipe.” The Jewel Song is often said to have been written expressly for her, but this is untrue. It was with reluctance that she agreed to sing it, dreading lest her personal success might not sufficiently compensate for the strain on her voice. Ultimately she conquered the natural defects of her voice until Gounod wrote of “that marvellous style and power of execution which have set her in the highest place among contemporary singers.”

## “ROMEO AND JULIET”

In France this opera is placed before “Faust.” In the opinion of most critics on this side of the Channel it should rank next to what is surely the greater work. In any case, only these two, of all the operas of Gounod, can be regarded as unmistakable successes. “Faust” was in France a kind of innovation, and “Romeo and Juliet” might be described as the offshoot and sequence. The subject had been exploited by many composers before Gounod touched it, but he has eclipsed all previous efforts.

It is unnecessary to go over the story, since the

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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composer's librettists have followed Shakespeare's version of the legend, and even his diction, very closely. The first Act represents the ball at Capulet's house, the stolen march of Romeo and his friends, the first meeting of the lovers, and the recognition of Romeo by the vindictive Tybalt. The second Act is the famous Balcony Scene. The third is divided into two scenes: (1) Friar Laurence's cell, where Romeo and Juliet are secretly married; and (2) the street outside Capulet's house, with the double duel and the banishment of Romeo. The fourth Act reveals Juliet's room, where the lovers part, and Juliet takes the sleeping potion from the Friar. The last Act comprises a front and a set scene. In the former, Friar Laurence learns that his instructions to Romeo have miscarried; in the latter the tomb of the Capulets is seen. The opera ends, like the drama, with the death of the lovers.

Gounod's music admirably illustrates the subject. The plot is practically a succession of love-duets; and it is love—dreamy, languorous, tender, and voluptuous, a thing woven of moonlight—that is chiefly pictured in the score. For this Gounod, as the reader will have already gathered, was peculiarly suited by temperament. A French interviewer, describing him in his study, said that there was always something feminine about him; remarking at the same time the charming persuasiveness and sweet, mellow-toned, unctuous eloquence of his speech.



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## “ROMEO AND JULIET”

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These characteristics are seen in both his great operas, but more especially—and naturally, from the nature of the theme—in “Romeo and Juliet.” The music as a whole lacks continuity, but this is lost sight of in the passion and interest and beauty of the single numbers. The scene in Juliet’s room is delightfully tender, and the balcony duet is melodious and expressive. There is a showy waltz-arietta for Juliet at the ball, and a striking solo for Friar Laurence, with a strong trio and quartet following. The charming madrigal for two voices in the first Act, and the tragic scene in the tomb, with its profound melancholy, are also worth noting. The ballet should perhaps be regarded as an excrescence, since it retards the action and checks the interest with no other compensation than a display of limbs.

The first performance was at the Théâtre Lyrique on April 27, 1867. It was a dazzling *première*; and this time at least the composer had not to wait before reaping his laurels. The opera was played for a hundred consecutive nights. It was revived at the Opera Comique in 1873, and held its place in the repertoire for fifteen years. In London, it was included in Mme. Patti’s repertoire in an Italian version, but it was not until 1889, when Sir Augustus Harris staged it in the original French, that it became the rage. Its vogue has somewhat dwindled, but it will be long before it dies out entirely.

## THOMAS' "MIGNON"

AFTER Gounod, it is not inappropriate to follow with Ambroise Thomas' only surviving opera, for Thomas was greatly influenced by "Faust," though he had already written operas redolent of the styles of Auber and Halévy. He was an older man than Gounod, having been born in 1811. His father was a music teacher, and he himself became a distinguished pupil of the Paris Conservatoire, of which he was appointed head in 1871. The operas of his first period were for the most part coolly received, and, in consequence, he temporarily devoted himself to other branches of composition. But by 1850 he had gained a place of honour among French opera composers, and 1866 brought the decided success of "Mignon," written for the Opera Comique. Two years later came his "Hamlet," still performed and much appreciated in France. His last opera, "Françoise de Rimini," written many years before, was produced in 1882, but with only moderate success. Thomas died in February 1896.

The story of "Mignon" is derived from Goethe's "Wilhelm Meister." It is founded on that favourite operatic subject (used in "The Bohemian Girl" and

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## THOMAS' "MIGNON"

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elsewhere) of the abduction of a high-born young lady and her sojourn with the gipsy tribe. Mignon, the heroine, being thus torn away from her home, her father, Lothario, a widower, becomes mentally deranged, and wanders about in the guise of a harper, searching for his daughter. Meanwhile, Jarno, the gipsy leader, treats Mignon with inhuman harshness. Trading on her beauty, he compels her to dance in public, and chastises her for her shortcomings. Presently a travelling student, Wilhelm Meister, pitying her miserable condition, ransoms her from the gipsies. Touched by his goodness, Mignon becomes desperately enamoured of her deliverer. Of this Wilhelm is ignorant, and settles his affections on Philine, a pretty actress.

A grand entertainment is given at the Castle of Rosenberg, and Philine's services are engaged. Wilhelm and Mignon (disguised as a page) are both present. Applause greets the actress and fans the flame of Wilhelm's love. Mignon is about to drown herself in a fit of jealousy when she meets Lothario. Mutually ignorant of each other's identity, Mignon confides her griefs to the aged minstrel; to whom she further expresses a wish that the Castle were in flames. Subsequently the Castle is found to be on fire. It is the work of Lothario. In the midst of the alarm, Mignon (who had returned to the house) is missing. She is given up for lost, but is rescued by Wilhelm from the burning *débris*. She is next found

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## F A V O U R I T E O P E R A S

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in her father's mansion, suffering from shock. In her delirium she breathes her love for Wilhelm. A girdle worn in childhood and the accents of an infant prayer reveal to Lothario the secret of her identity. Speedy recovery comes to the invalid, and Wilhelm, having now forgotten the fascinations of Philine, is ready to return her love and make her his own.

One of Thomas' biographers describes his musical nature as "akin to that of Gounod: full of intelligence, grace, and elegance." Grace and elegance are the prominent features of the music of "Mignon," which has indeed a plaintive charm all its own. There is nothing "powerful" about it, and nothing strikingly original; but it is bright and fresh and natural, and these qualities have insured it a wide popularity. The dainty Gavotte is known to thousands who have never seen the opera itself.

## AUBER'S "MASANIELLO" AND "FRA DIAVOLO"

It has been remarked that Thomas wrote his earlier operas under the influence of Auber and Halévy. Several of Auber's operas are still popular abroad, but only two, named above, have held the stage in this country. Auber was born in Normandy in 1782, the son of one of the king's officers of the chase. He was sent to London to qualify for a commercial career, but returned more determined than ever to be a musician. He became a pupil of Cherubini, whom he ultimately succeeded as Director of the Paris Conservatoire, and to whom he owed his technical mastery of the art. His long, active career as a dramatic composer began when he was twenty, but he did not make any lasting impression until about thirteen years later. "Masaniello," produced in 1828, was his first grand opera, and it raised him to the heights of fame. It was the first of the three works which, in rapid succession, completely revolutionised the repertoire of the Paris Grand Opera, the other two being Rossini's "William Tell" (1829), and Meyerbeer's "Robert le Diable" (1831). It was followed by a long series of works; but, besides

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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the elegant "Fra Diavolo," Auber's most popular opera at home and abroad, only "Le Domino Noir" need be mentioned. His last work, "Le Rêve d'Amour," was produced when he was eighty-eight.

Auber was a thorough Parisian. Not even the dangers of the Prussian siege would induce him to leave the beloved capital; and indeed his death, in May 1871, was partly caused by the horrors of the Commune. He was a notable wit, and hundreds of good stories are told of him. He had a fad of never being present at the performance of his own works. "If I assisted at one of my works, I should never write another note in my life," he said. Auber was the last great representative of opera comique. It is worth observing, perhaps, that he was one of the models chosen by the young Wagner about the time Wagner wrote "Die Feen" ("The Fairies").

### "MASANIELLO"

This work was written for the Paris Grand Opera, where, as just stated, it was produced in 1828. The theme of the libretto was intimately related to the political agitations of the time. The established Government of France remained but two years longer; and it was a performance of the opera in Brussels, in August 1830, which indirectly led to the riots that ultimately ended in the separation of

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## “MASANIELLO”

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Belgium and Holland. The subject is more clearly expressed by the original French title, “*La Muette de Portici*.”

Fenella, a dumb girl of Portici, has been seduced by Alfonso, son of the Spanish Viceroy of Naples. She is subjected to confinement, but escapes, and denounces her betrayer immediately after his marriage to the Princess Elvira. Her brother, the fisherman Masaniello, incensed by her wrongs, organises a popular revolt, overturns the Spanish rule, and is proclaimed King of Naples by his exultant followers. At the instance of the forgiving Fenella, he spares the lives of Elvira and Alfonso; but the generous action costs him his own life, and, in despair, Fenella plunges into a stream of boiling lava pouring from Vesuvius.

As regards the music of “*Masaniello*,” it should be enough for modern opera-goers that Wagner praised it. He at least could not be prejudiced! He acknowledges “the bold effects in the instrumentation, particularly in the treatment of the strings, the dramatic grouping of the choral masses, which here for the first time take an important part in the action, no less than original harmonies and happy strokes of dramatic characterisation.” Superfine critics talk of its formality, and protest that its “pretty tunes” are inconsistent with the seriousness of the theme. The mad scene, too, is said to be conventional. But there is impulse, fire, and passion

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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in the work; and it is certainly, in point of date, the first example of the grand style of French opera that we have. The rôle of Fenella is notable as introducing a dumb but dancing principal character, a feature which Auber repeated in a later opera. Many famous dancers have been associated with the part.

### “FRA DIAVOLO”

The scene of this opera is laid at the village inn of Terracina, in Italy. Lord and Lady Rocburg, an English couple on their travels, arrive in an excited state, having been robbed by brigands. At the inn they meet a distinguished visitor calling himself the Marquis of San Marco; who is, however, none other than the notorious brigand leader, Fra Diavolo—said to have existed in real life, by the way. He makes violent love to the impressionable Englishwoman, and so wins her confidence. Meanwhile, Lorenzo, in love with the innkeeper's daughter, Zerlina, has gone off after the brigands. Coming up with the party, he kills twenty, and secures Lady Rocburg's stolen jewels; for which service he is rewarded by 1000 ducats, and may now hope for Zerlina's hand, hitherto denied by her father. Fra Diavolo is furious at the loss of his mates, and vows revenge on Lorenzo. To that end he conceals himself in a closet adjoining Zerlina's bedroom, and smuggles



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## “ F R A D I A V O L O ”

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two of his followers into the house. Being discovered before he can execute his scheme, he alleges that he is there at Zerlina's invitation. This covert accusation is too much for Lorenzo, who immediately challenges the brigand to a duel. A meeting is arranged, but before it comes off, Fra Diavolo's identity is revealed, and Lorenzo has the satisfaction of hearing him acknowledge Zerlina's innocence before he dies.

The music of this sprightly work, which was first produced in 1830, shows Auber in his happiest vein. It is not of a very strong cast, but it is full of grace and charm. It includes, as one appreciative critic summarises it, “a bright medley overture and popular march, an effective quarrel scene and quintet, an attractive romanza for Zerlina, a barcarolle for Fra Diavolo, some refreshing mountain songs, and a strong finale.”

## HALÉVY'S "LA JUIVE"

JACQUES FRANÇOIS HALÉVY, who has been coupled with Auber, was born in Paris in 1799, and died at Nice in 1862. He was a Jew, his real name being Levi. He, too, was a pupil of Cherubini and the Conservatoire. Also, like Gounod and Thomas, he won the *Prix de Rome*, which takes the holder for three years to Italy. He became a prolific writer for the stage, and distinguished himself as a professor at the Conservatoire. His operas, from the first in 1827 to the unfinished "Vanina d'Ornano," completed by Bizet, make a very long list in the musical dictionaries, and show a wonderful versatility of style. But not one met with a reception at all to be compared with "La Juive" ("The Jewess"), produced at the Grand Opera, Paris, on February 23, 1835. This is his *chef-d'œuvre*, and by it the esteem in which he was held as a composer was immeasurably increased. Gounod and Bizet (who married his daughter, Geneviève) were among his many renowned pupils. With Cherubini, the ruler of the operatic stage in Paris, he maintained his friendship to the last, though it was often rudely put to the proof. The late Sir Charles Hallé tells

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## HALÉVY'S "LA JUIVE"

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how Cherubini once went to see the production of one of Halévy's operas from the composer's box. He kept complete silence there till, after the second Act, Halévy asked: "Maestro, have you nothing to say to me?" To which Cherubini snarled back: "I have been listening to you for two hours, and *you* have said nothing to *me*."

The plot of "La Juive" has been well described as gory. The time is about 1414, when the Austrians dominated Switzerland, and the Jews were persecuted by all classes. The action is in the city of Constance. Prince Leopold, disguised, and pretending to be of the Israelitish faith, seeks to win the affection of Rachel, daughter of Eleazar, a wealthy Jew. During a general holiday which celebrates the arrival of the Emperor, Eleazar and his daughter incur the fury of the mob because, in defiance of edict, Eleazar has kept his shop open. The pair are saved from death by the Cardinal, who entertains a secret sympathy for Eleazar. The second Act takes place at the house of Eleazar, who has arranged a religious feast at which the pretended Israelite is present. The feast is interrupted by the arrival of Eudoxia, a niece of the Emperor, who buys an expensive chain from Eleazar, and orders it to be engraved with the name of herself and her husband, Prince Leopold.

Leopold overhears the conversation, and, troubled by remorse, confesses to Rachel that he is a Christian. Love prevails over faith, and the Jewess consents to

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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elope with her deceiver, when Eleazar unexpectedly appears and frustrates the design. The Jew declares that he will be revenged on Leopold, but, at his daughter's earnest entreaty, agrees to overlook the past. Leopold asserting this to be impossible, Eleazar curses him, while Rachel is overwhelmed with despair.

The third Act opens with an imperial banquet at which Eleazar attends with the chain ordered by Eudoxia. Eudoxia hangs it round the neck of her husband Leopold, who is recognised by Eleazar and Rachel as the perfidious infidel. Rachel openly charges him with having seduced her—a crime then punishable by death. Leopold admits the truth. The Cardinal then pronounces anathema on the trio, and they are led off to prison to await his sentence. In the fourth Act Eudoxia obtains an interview with Rachel and pleads with her to retract her accusation. The Jewess thereupon declares the innocence of Leopold and resolves to die alone. The Cardinal, whose sympathy for Eleazar hangs on the fate of a daughter lost to him in early childhood, and of whose fortunes he has reason to suppose the Jew is cognisant, promises a full pardon on condition that Eleazar embraces the Christian faith. Eleazar refuses. So, while Leopold is freed, Eleazar and Rachel are condemned to death. At the fatal moment when Rachel is plunged into a cauldron of boiling oil, Eleazar points her out to the Cardinal as

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## HALÉVY'S "LA JUIVE"

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his own long-lost daughter, saved during infancy from a burning building; and the curtain falls on Eleazar following Rachel to the terrible death.

Halévy never wrote anything finer than "La Juive." The music shows traces of the influence of Meyerbeer, who in turn (in "The Huguenots," produced the following year) was influenced by "La Juive." But there is an individuality in it, too, especially in its sharp contrasts and passionate outbursts; and its serious, sober dignity compels the admiration of the listener. This latter quality is all the more astonishing that within the same year Halévy produced, in "L'Eclair," a musical comedy in a style completely different. Mr. Streatfeild finds most of "La Juive" "exceedingly long-winded and dull," but the general opinion is more favourable, otherwise the opera would long since have been buried in oblivion.

## HÉROLD'S "ZAMPA"

LOUIS HÉROLD was born in Paris in 1791, the son of a pianist who had studied under Emanuel Bach. He, also, went to the Conservatoire, and also took the *Prix de Rome*. After the three years' study at Rome he proceeded to Naples, where, in 1815, he was successful with his maiden opera. Returning to Paris, he collaborated in an opera with Boieldieu, the composer of "La Dame Blanche." This work was favourably received, and in the same year (1816) Hérold brought out, at the Opera Comique, his own "Les Rosieres," which took the town by storm. In his next opera, "La Clochette," he maintained the reputation he had thus won.

But many failures followed, due in most cases to the choice of poor libretti; and it was not until 1831 that he wrote the work by which he is now chiefly known. This was "Zampa," which even to-day enjoys an almost undiminished popularity in Germany. In the following year he produced what his countrymen regard as the crown of his creations, "Le Pré aux Clercs." The thousandth performance of this work was given in Paris in 1871, but in England its vogue has not been great. Hérold lived

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## HÉROLD'S "ZAMPA"

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a strenuous life, and the drudgery of his professional occupations (he was accompanist, and later, chorus-master at the Italian Opera) did not leave him sufficient leisure for the full development of his talent. He had been in poor health for some years before he succumbed to a chest complaint in 1833. Shortly before his death he modestly remarked to a friend: "I am going too soon; I was just beginning to understand the stage." Thus also Haydn, at the end of his long career, spoke of himself as having only begun to know how to use the wind instruments of the orchestra.

The libretto of "Zampa" is excellent in the number and variety of the dramatic situations, but it has a somewhat artificial plot, and several of the incidents are fantastic and absurd. Zampa is a notorious pirate, who, finding Italy too hot for him, has taken to the high seas. He had ruined a girl named Alice Manfredi, who, being deserted by him, was befriended by a wealthy Sicilian merchant named Lugano. She died, and Lugano raised a statue in her honour which was regarded and venerated as a saint in the country. When the story of the opera begins, Lugano is Zampa's prisoner. Lugano has a daughter, Camilla, who is about to be married to Alfonso de Monza, a young officer. But Zampa becomes enamoured of Camilla, and demands her hand as a ransom for her father. Camilla consents after a long resistance. At the marriage festivities

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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Zampa is confronted with the statue of the betrayed Alice, which, at the proper moment, interferes, bears Zampa away to the infernal regions, and leaves Camilla to her lover.

Hérold was a man of undoubted genius, and in the music of "Zampa" we recognise the hand of a master who, "to the spirit of Italian music unites the depth of the German and the elegance of the French school." The fairest criticism of his famous opera would seem to be expressed in the words of a countryman of his own. The quartet in the first Act, "Le Voila," is a model of dignity and refinement; the recognition duet in the second is full of life, taste, and dramatic skill; and the deep and eminently characteristic pathos of the principal number of the third Act, the duet, "Pourquoi trembler?" makes it one of the finest things in modern opera. There is also much variety of form and movement in the different pieces. For example, the first finale, with its richly contrasted effects, is entirely different from the second. "Zampa" has been called a French "Don Giovanni," but the comparison is inapt and the implied praise exaggerated. It is enough that the work has still power to please.



## BOIELDIEU'S "LA DAME BLANCHE"

FRANÇOIS ADRIEN BOIELDIEU was born at Rouen in 1775. His father was secretary to the Archbishop, and the boy joined the cathedral choir. His mother, a milliner, had been divorced, and the father remarried. The home was unhappy, and Boieldieu went to live with the cathedral organist, who alternately gave him lessons and whacked him. On one occasion he ran away, and had to be brought back from Paris. Two little operas which he produced in Rouen, before he was twenty, were so well received that he was encouraged to try his luck in the capital.

His first fortunate venture was the once-popular "Califè de Bagdad." After one of the successful performances of this opera, Cherubini accosted the elated composer in the lobby of the theatre with the words: "Malheureux! are you not ashamed of such undeserved fortune?" The idea was that Boieldieu had not yet mastered the technique of his profession. He took the hint, and underwent a severe course with Cherubini himself. After an interval of twelve years he produced one of his best works, though now seldom heard—"Jean de Paris," which had a brilliant success. Then, in 1825, came "La Dame Blanche,"

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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the best of all his productions. He wrote only one opera after this, but it was diffidently received, and he laid aside his pen for ever.

Boieldieu had a somewhat unhappy career. He married a dancer in 1802, and, partly at least, to escape the domestic misery which resulted, fled next year to St. Petersburg, where he remained till 1810. In 1817 he was made professor of composition at the Conservatoire. From this position he retired in 1829 with a good pension, which was, however, reduced next year. Subsequently, his finances being unsatisfactory, he was reinstated at the Conservatoire by his own desire, but he died soon afterwards (1834) from consumption. The troubles of his later years were softened by his second wife, by whom he had a son, Adrien, not without a modest fame as a composer.

The story of "La Dame Blanche" is founded on incidents taken from Scott's "Monastery" and "Guy Mannering." The Laird of Avenel, a zealous Jacobite, was exiled after Culloden. He left his estates, and considerable treasure which he had amassed for the Stuart cause, in the care of his steward, Gaveston. The treasure was hidden in a statue called the White Lady, the "lady," according to local tradition, being a benevolent genius attached to the Laird's family, and accustomed at times to haunt the castle. The Laird having died in exile, and there being no tidings of his heir, Gaveston

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## “LA DAME BLANCHE”

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announces the sale of the castle and lands, hoping himself to obtain them at a low figure, under the assumption that nobody will outbid him from dread of the White Lady.

The day before the sale, George Brown, a young soldier just arrived in the village, has an interview at the castle with Anna, an orphan girl whom the dead Laird had befriended, and now appearing in the disguise of the White Lady. Anna recognises George as the officer whom she had succoured after a battle, and knowing him to be the rightful heir of Avenel, she arranges that he shall become the purchaser at the sale. George has no money to make good his title. But, at the important moment, Anna discovers the treasure and presents it to George, appearing publicly in the character of the White Lady. Gaveston approaches the spectre and tearing aside the veil discovers Anna, his ward. After which, of course, George weds Anna.

“La Dame Blanche” is the work most characteristic of Boieldieu’s style. There is a certain homely tenderness in its abundance of charming melodies which, as has been said, proves its kinship to that source of all truly national music, the popular song. The Scots airs introduced into the score are exact transcriptions, but they are made to sound entirely French by their harmonic and rhythmical treatment. “Robin Adair” (*not* a Scots air, by the way), described as “le chant ordinaire de la tribu d’Avenel,”

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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would perhaps hardly be recognised even in Ireland, but what it has lost in raciness it has gained in sweetness.

The thoroughly organic structure of the ensembles ought to be remarked. In the finale of the second Act, for instance, we have a large ensemble of seven solo voices and chorus. All these comment upon one and the same event with sentiments as widely divergent as can well be imagined. This ensemble, and indeed the whole auction scene, almost approach the classical. The opera has—curiously enough, considering its Scottish theme—enjoyed an even greater popularity in France than in England. Up to June 1875 it had been performed at the same Parisian theatre 1340 times. Boieldieu modestly attributed part of his success to the national reaction against the Rossini worship of the preceding years, of which we shall hear by-and-by.

# VERDI OPERAS

## THE COMPOSER

BORN in 1813, within a few months of Wagner, Giuseppe Verdi survived Wagner for eighteen years, and when he died in January 1901, at the long age of eighty-seven, he was living a life free from care and full of happiness in a magnificent villa only a few miles from his birthplace. He went to his rest crowned with honours, the most striking phenomenon that the history of opera has to record. For Verdi had met with a modest operatic success before he was long out of his teens; and after sixty years of almost continuous labour, he startled the art world with a consummate masterpiece, "Falstaff," written, with all the verve and vitality of youth, when he was eighty.

It required a strong character to live the life that Verdi lived; to preserve at the end of eighty-seven years that freshness of interest, that intensity of purpose, that industry which characterised him almost up to the last. The explanation may be partly found in his humble origin, his simple upbringing, and the ascetic regularity of his adult existence. His father kept a little inn and grocery shop in the village of

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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Roncole, in the Duchy of Parma. The boy's musical predilections soon appeared, and he was sent to study with the village organist. When only eleven, he succeeded his teacher in the post—at a salary of thirty-six francs a year! He had a hundred francs when he left six years later, but he was then walking every Sunday and festival day from Busseto, three miles distant, whither he had gone for his general education. Many years afterwards his name was found scratched on the organ-case, and traces of it are still piously preserved.

There is a pretty story connected with the spinet which his father bought for him from one of the priests. When examined by his Italian biographer, it was found to contain a manuscript note stating that one Stefano Cavaletti had repaired it and added the pedal without charge, “in consideration of the good disposition which the young Giuseppe Verdi shows in learning to play on the said instrument, which quite suffices me.” There is a still prettier story of how Verdi got first a patron and then a wife.

At Busseto there lived a musical amateur, a distiller named Barezzi. He took a fancy to young Verdi, opened his home to him, employed him in his warehouse, and allowed him the treat of practising on a piano fresh from Vienna. Barezzi had a daughter who played. The usual results followed—the pair fell in love with each other, and were married in

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## THE COMPOSER

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1835. It was a happy, but also, alas! a short union. Two children were born. Both died in 1840, and, within a few weeks after the last was taken, the mother died.

Verdi was so poor at this time that he had to pawn his wife's trinkets for the rent. He had just accepted an engagement to write a comic opera, and he went on with it while his heart was breaking. We can hardly wonder that the opera was a failure; and it is significant that the composer attempted nothing in lighter vein until his "Falstaff" of the last years. Touching pictures have been drawn of him at this date, sitting moody and silent for a whole year and more, writing nothing, seeing nobody, and declaring that life was not worth living. But youth gets over most things, and in time Verdi spurred himself up to renewed effort.

It should have been said that three years before his marriage he had made an unsuccessful application for entry as a student at the Milan Conservatoire. The precise cause of his rejection has never been made clear, and, at any rate, he did as well for himself as a private student. It was in 1838 that he took up his permanent residence in Milan, and next year he produced his first opera, now totally forgotten, at the Scala Theatre. He used to say that his musical career really began with the production in 1842 of "Nabucco," an opera on the not very promising subject of Nebuchadnezzar, but that,

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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too, has been overtaken by oblivion, despite Donizetti's verdict, "It's fine! uncommonly fine!"

It was, however, followed directly by two operas which are still occasionally staged—"I Lombardi" in 1843, and "Ernani" in 1844. At both the rival London opera-houses the latter was for long the most admired and the most frequently played of all his works. But the operas by which Verdi first made a name in the wide world of music were the trio which, with "Aïda," have been selected for attention in these pages, namely, "Il Trovatore," "La Traviata," and "Rigoletto." Their individual story is told in the respective sections.

For the rest, there is little more to say of Verdi's career except that from this time onwards he was world-famous, and that operas from his pen were ordered in quick succession. By the time that "Aïda" was written (in 1871) he had completely changed his style. The earliest of his works were of the traditional Italian school, with its conventional plot, its artificial arrangement of solo and chorus, and its tawdry orchestration, like a glorified guitar. Later, about 1849, he adopted a second style, when the orchestra began to be treated as something more than a mere accompaniment, when the melodies were something more than mere pegs for showing off the vocal powers of the artistes. Touches of high dramatic power also began to be observed. To this period belongs "Rigoletto." Then, still draw-



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## THE COMPOSER

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ing towards a loftier and more truly dramatic style, he reached the fulness of his third period, beginning with "Aïda," and ending with "Othello" (1887) and "Falstaff" (1893). In these Shakespearean masterpieces he left the domain of catching melody altogether: the continuity of the modern school is in them, and the music is dramatic rather than merely tuneful. All critics dwell with emphasis on these changes from a meretricious to an earnest style, and pay homage to Verdi for having of his own accord adopted them. Beginning by writing down to his public, he "ended by drawing his public upward to a higher domain of art, and by arresting the decay which seemed to have settled like a blight upon the opera in Italy."

Verdi worked almost up to the end. It is even said that he would have produced a successor to "Falstaff" but for the awful task of writing so many notes. The fount of inspiration was unexhausted, but the mere manual labour required to give it a tangible existence vexed and tired this musical hero of eighty-seven. He maintained the simplicity and regularity of his life. As far back as 1849 he had bought the fine country estate of St. Agata, near Roncole, and there he lived in almost complete seclusion, his only companions being a couple of huge Pyrenean hounds. In a sense he never recovered from the accumulated calamities of his youth. Naturally reserved, he had "eaten his bread with

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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tears," and remained all his days unmoved by the flood-tide of success; a grave, taciturn, dignified, impenetrable figure, coldly magnanimous in speech though generous in action.

He was a life Senator but took no part in politics, though he once said that he would have given all his operas to be able to make a single speech. Apart from music, his interests were mainly agricultural. He had married a second time, the soprano Giuseppina Strepponi, who sang in his early "Nabucco," and she predeceased him by three years. He amassed a big fortune, something like £120,000, and, having no family, left it all to the home for aged and indigent musicians which he had already founded at Milan.

A word or two might be added about Verdi's visits to England. He came first in 1847 to superintend the production of a forgotten opera, "I Masnadieri," in which Jenny Lind and the famous Lablache sang. Queen Victoria (who always liked Verdi's music) and the Prince Consort were present, and the house was packed. But critics severely condemned the music, and the work ultimately proved a dead failure. Verdi was disgusted, and shook the dust of England off his feet, never to return save for a couple of flying visits—the one in 1862, the other in 1875, when he conducted his "Requiem" at the Royal Albert Hall. He might well have forgiven England's early indifference, for nowhere else did

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## “RIGOLETTO”

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his more popular operas create a greater furore or remain longer the “rage.”

### “RIGOLETTO”

In point of date this is the earliest of the Verdi operas which have retained their place in public favour. Founded on Victor Hugo's “Le Roi s'amuse,” the plot would seem to be the reversion of the wickedness of the sinner on the head of the sinner himself. Its outline is as follows :

ACT 1.—Rigoletto is the Duke of Mantua's jester. The Duke is a sensual libertine, and Rigoletto abets him in his evil purposes. He assists him to debauch the wives of Count Ceprano and Count Monterone, the latter of whom utters a terrible malediction against him which fills Rigoletto with a fearful foreboding. Rigoletto has a daughter, the beautiful Gilda. Gilda, so far as he can order it, shall never be contaminated by the pernicious influence of the Court. So, to that end, he immures her in an out-of-the-way part of the city. But the Duke discovers her retreat, wins her affections in the disguise of a student, and arranges for her forcible abduction and transference to the Palace.

ACT 2.—When Rigoletto discovers his daughter there, he is horrified—horrified especially to find that she loves the Duke. He vows vengeance against

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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Gilda's seducer, and hires a desperado named Sparafucile to assassinate him. Sparafucile is the proprietor of a lonely wayside inn; and he engages his sister, Maddalena, who acts as a decoy for victims, and who is herself enamoured of the handsome Duke, to lure him to the hostelry.

ACT 3.—The Duke arrives at the inn, and makes love to Maddalena, singing the familiar “*La donna e mobile*.” Meanwhile, Rigoletto has been persuading Gilda to rig herself out as a cavalier, with the object of escaping from the Palace. But before she flies, he sends her to the door of the inn that she may prove for herself the Duke's faithlessness. Maddalena has fallen more than ever in love with the Duke, and, making an appeal to her brother, gets him to promise that he will spare the Duke's life on condition that he may kill the first person who enters the inn. For Sparafucile had bound himself to bring the Duke's body in a sack to Rigoletto before claiming his reward. Gilda, overhearing the discussion in the inn, and still infatuated with the Duke, resolves to save his life. She knocks for admittance, and is promptly stabbed by Sparafucile. Rigoletto, coming for the supposed victim's body, opens the sack, discovers his daughter, and falls senseless upon her. The opera ends with the prostration of Rigoletto, whose dreaded forebodings of Count Monterone's terrible curse are thus literally realised.



Sale at terrazzo con and lanterna



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## “ R I G O L E T T O ”

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As regards the music, “Rigoletto” marked an immense progress in Verdi’s style. The instrumentation is far less noisy than in former works, and has more significance than a mere accompaniment. There are brilliant touches of dramatic power, particularly in the last Act. The vocal score contains many effective passages, such as Rigoletto’s wrath at the stratagem of the courtiers in abducting his daughter; Gilda’s love-song, “Caro Nome”; and the Duke’s gay and lightsome aria, “La donna e mobile,” so full of elegant ease, and so striking in rhythm. The magnificent quartet, “Un di, si ben rammento mi,” sung by Rigoletto, Gilda, the Duke, and Maddalena, is often remarked upon by critics as combining the most diverse emotions into a powerful ensemble. Even to-day it is a model of concerted writing. Here, and in other places, Verdi reached a level of art which he had never before attained, and which, indeed, he did not touch again until twenty years later in “Aïda.”

Written and instrumented, under the prompting of managerial necessity, in forty days, “Rigoletto” was first produced at Venice on March 11, 1851. Like “Faust” and “Carmen,” it did not take the fancy of the public at first, but ultimately won its way to the forefront of popular esteem. The famous “La donna e mobile,” already referred to, made an instantaneous hit, and was long hummed and sung and played to boredom in every quarter of the globe.

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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To make quite sure that the public should not get wind of this arresting melody before the night of the performance, Verdi did not put it on paper until within a few hours of the time when Mirate, the tenor, had to sing it. Soon all Venice was mad over it; and the men, they say, sang it in the streets into the ears of the women. The opera was heard in Paris in 1857, and was received with great applause. Some years before, a French musical journal declared that it was "the least strong" of all Verdi's works, and that it had "not the slightest chance of maintaining itself in the repertoire." It is a safe dictum never to prophesy unless one knows!

### "IL TROVATORE"

This is the most widely popular of all Verdi's operas. The libretto was prepared by the poet Cammarano, who based it on a Spanish contemporary drama of the same title—a drama "written in magnificent verse" by a youth of seventeen. This youth, Antonio Garcia Gultierrez, was on the point of drawing for the conscription when he completed his "El Trovador." He took it to the theatre, where it was at once put in rehearsal. Meanwhile he had been preparing to don his uniform, being too poor to buy himself off. Luckily, "El Trovador" obtained a phenomenal success, and allowed him to



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## “IL TROVATORE”

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furnish a substitute. Verdi's French biographer, Pougin, says he is “willing to believe” that the Spanish drama was “clearer, more transparent, and far more comprehensible than the strange libretto taken from it by Cammarano.” It is perfectly safe to say this, for the libretto of “Il Trovatore” is sadly confused, and much of it borders on the incomprehensible. Revenge for a mother's death is its keynote, and we may summarise it in this way :

ACT 1.—An old gipsy, the mother of Azucena, has been burnt as a witch by the father of the present wicked Count di Luna. Azucena, to revenge her mother's death, steals the Count's younger brother, Manrico, tries to kill him, and, by mistake, kills her own child instead. She therefore brings up Manrico as her own son, and he becomes a wandering minstrel or troubadour, though this sequel is unknown when the opera begins. Leonora, a lady of the Spanish Court, is the object of Manrico's affections, and, as fate will have it, of the Count's also. Jealousy, of course, ensues, and there is a challenge and a duel. With the wounding of Manrico the Act ends.

ACT 2.—This takes place at Azucena's gipsy camp. Manrico is there, and from Azucena he now first learns the story of his birth. He cannot believe it. Then a messenger arrives with word that Leonora, supposing him dead, proposes to become a nun. Contention again arises. The rivals—Manrico and the Count—meet in the convent; Manrico's attend-

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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ants overcome the Count's, and Manrico bears off Leonora.

ACT 3.—Here we have the Count besieging Castellor, whither Leonora has fled with Manrico. The lovers were about to be united. But Manrico learns that Azucena, taken for a spy and subsequently recognised as the supposed murderess of the Count's brother, is condemned to be burnt by the Count. Manrico attempts to rescue her, but is himself captured.

ACT 4.—Leonora visits Manrico in prison. She offers to marry the Count as the condition of Manrico's release, meaning all the time to take poison in preference to surrendering herself to the Count. Manrico refuses liberty on these terms. The Count sends him to the scaffold; and only after the execution does he learn from Azucena that he has sacrificed his long-lost brother.

The music of "Il Trovatore" has been described as often distressingly simple and tawdry; and undoubtedly it does show a falling off from the promise of "Rigoletto." But Mr. Louis Elson, an American writer, has probably best answered this objection by pointing to its direct melodic and dramatic force; a feature which deserves far more praise than some critics are willing to accord to a work of the purely tuneful school that once inspired a thousand barrel organs. After all, "magnificent tunes" are not to be sneered at. Verdi's music was meant to please a



'One price there is—one I know  
And that to you I offer'



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## “IL TROVATORE”

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public wholly childlike in its emotions and impulses, and it achieved, as it still achieves, that purpose. The Count's great bass aria “Il Balen,” the bright “Anvil Chorus” of the gipsies, Manrico's spirited air “Di Quella Pira,” his tender duet with Azucena, the great “Miserere,” and the effective prison scene, these are not made of the stuff that is found in Wagner; but, as Mr. Elson says, they are wholly good and appropriate in their own fluent way, and even the classicist must acknowledge their direct melodic charm.

A space of nearly two years elapsed between the performance of “Rigoletto” and “Il Trovatore,” which was first produced in Rome, at the Apollo Theatre, on January 19, 1853. It evoked frenzied excitement. The eagerness of the Roman public to hear it was extraordinary. On the eve of the performance, the Tiber had risen in flood and invaded the whole district near the theatre. But in spite of everything—the cold, the mud, and the general discomfort—from nine o'clock in the morning the doors of the Apollo were besieged by a great crowd, who, with their feet in water up to the ankles, squeezed, pushed, and disputed in order to get places for the evening. Such a concourse had never been seen, and when the opera gradually unfolded itself it obtained “an immense and boisterous success, the echoes of which resounded in a short time from one end of Italy to the other.” Its spread was, in fact, electrical,

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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not only in Italy but through the whole of Europe. Theatre after theatre produced it, answering the clamour of eager subscribers and patrons. At Naples three houses were giving it at the same time. Seldom was an opera more fortunate.

### “LA TRAVIATA”

The story of this long-lived favourite is founded on the younger Dumas' novel and play, “*La Dame aux Camélias*.” As evolved in the text, it is easily told. It is a sort of drawing-room tragedy—the somewhat sickly tale of love and death of Dumas' Marguerite Gauthier, here called Violetta.

ACT I.—Violetta is a reigning belle, in fact, a courtesan, but purely devoted to an honest lover. The Act opens at a reception in her house in Paris. Alfred Germont, whom she has recently met, is regarded by her with greater favour than other admirers, and they pledge their troth after the singing by Violetta of the famous scena, “*Ah ! fors' è lui.*” Alfred makes himself conspicuous by trolling out a Bacchanalian song for the general amusement. In the midst of this jollity Violetta gives unmistakable signs of a pulmonary complaint, and Alfred, left alone with her, expresses serious uneasiness on her account. When Alfred has gone, Violetta drops into dejected reflection on her sad



'Do you all here know this woman?'





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## “ L A T R A V I A T A ”

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condition, and presently resolves to drown her cares in dissipation. Here the Act ends.

ACT 2.—Three months have gone by. The scene is now at a country house near Paris, where Alfred and Violetta are spending a quiet period of love. One day Alfred learns from a chance remark of the maid that Violetta has arranged to sell her horses and carriages to provide for their needs. Stung by the thought that he is living at the expense of his mistress, he rushes off to Paris to prevent the sale. While he is absent, his old father calls, and, by representing to Violetta that his daughter's matrimonial prospects are endangered by Violetta's compromising connection with Alfred, induces Violetta to sacrifice her own feelings for the sake of Alfred's welfare. On Alfred's return, he receives a letter in which Violetta tells him she has left him for ever. The scene now shifts to the salon of another courtesan, Flora Bervoix. A masked ball is in progress. Alfred is there; and by-and-by Violetta enters on the arm of her present "protector," Baron Dauphol. She is naturally embarrassed by the sight of Alfred. A game for high stakes, with Alfred and the Baron for antagonists, does not improve the situation. Mischief ensues. Violetta appeals to Alfred not to fight. The maddened youth calls the entire company, confesses his former relations with Violetta, and flings her portrait at her feet.

ACT 3.—This Act opens in Violetta's chamber,

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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where Violetta is dying of consumption. A letter from the elder Germont informs her that Alfred has wounded the Baron, and will soon return to her. An affecting reconciliation follows between the lovers, when Alfred is stricken with remorse on learning from his father of Violetta's self-abnegation. This throws a transient gleam of solace over the unhappiness of Violetta, who, surrounded by her lover, her faithful servant, her medical attendant, and Alfred's father, terminates the tale of sin with repentance.

Musically, "La Traviata" is not a noble specimen even of Italian opera. But its abundant melody, much of it really graceful and refined, and the genuine emotion of many of its strains, have saved it from the oblivion which has overtaken other operas of its class and time. It is essentially a "singing opera" of the old florid school; and one cannot reasonably object to the verdict that it is "chiefly employed now as a means of allowing a popular prima donna to display her high notes and her diamonds." In his efforts to avoid vulgarity, Verdi occasionally falls into the slough of sentimentality. Nevertheless, the pathos of some of his scenes must be admitted as appealing, and that is mainly why the opera still keeps its place in popular favour. It is not musically great, but it is very humanly interesting.

Written almost concurrently with "Il Trovatore"

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## “ L A T R A V I A T A ”

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(Verdi usually took about a month to an opera), “La Traviata” was produced in Venice on March 6, 1853. The first performance was a brilliant fiasco. Verdi wrote next day to one of his pupils: “‘La Traviata’ last night a failure. Was the fault mine or the singers’? Time will decide.” The fault was not his. It was due to several causes. The tenor had a “violent hoarseness”; and the baritone, Varesi, purposely sang with indifference because he had been cast for a secondary part. At the close of the performance he sought to condole with Verdi. “Make your condolences,” replied the composer drily, “to yourself and your companions, who have not understood my music.”

But the real cause of the failure lay in another direction. Mme. Donatelli, a feeble actress, had been chosen to impersonate the heroine. Now, as an American writer observes, it is difficult to obtain an opera singer who looks near to death from consumption. But Donatelli was “afflicted with enormous stoutness,” and so, when the doctor declared that consumption had wasted her and that she had but a few hours to live, the audience simply roared with merriment—a state very different from that necessary to appreciate the tragic action of the last Act. But Verdi was justified in his confidence in the work. When a year had passed, it was brought out again, under quite different circumstances, at another theatre in Venice, when it obtained a marked success.

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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Thereafter it soon made a triumphal tour of Italy and the whole of Europe.

Its production in London in 1856 was as successful as elsewhere, thanks in part to Mdlle. Piccolomini, the spoiled darling of the public about that time. As it turned out, the work needed a strong personality such as hers to combat the opposition of its enemies. Two days after its first performance, a long letter appeared in the *Times* expressing in indignant terms the astonishment of the writer that an opera of such immoral tendency should have received stage licence. The letter was followed up by references from several London pulpits. Then appeared another letter, this time from the impresario of Her Majesty's, defending the libretto; pointing out that, far from doing harm, it emphasised the invariable reward of virtue and the punishment of vice. Of course the effect of the controversy was that every one was crazy to see this "wicked opera," which thus obtained a run unlike anything that Verdi had hitherto experienced. One can hardly understand now why "La Traviata" was singled out for censure, when "Don Giovanni" and "Lucrezia Borgia" were tolerated. In any case, tuneful music covers a multitude of sins, and Verdi survives when things more *risqué* have gone to the wall.

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## “ A Ì D A ”

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### “ AÌDA ”

Ismail Pasha, the Khedive of Egypt, had built a grand opera-house at Cairo, and, thinking to emulate Western potentates as an art patron, he commissioned Verdi to write an opera expressly for him. It was to be an opera, “if not of a national character, at least of a local nature, and to a certain extent of a patriotic colour.” When Verdi accepted the commission, he asked a suggestion for a subject. In reply he received a sketch prepared by Mariette Bey, the great French Egyptologist, based on “historical and archæological details of very powerful and very novel character.” It was only a sketch, but Verdi was impressed by the grandeur of its general design, and by the conception of the judgment scene, to which we owe the strange and powerfully dramatic tableau which forms the *dénouement*. The sketch was handed to M. Du Locle, who prepared the libretto as it now stands; though he declared that Verdi himself had taken a large share in the work, and that the idea of the last Act, with its two stages one above the other, belonged especially to him. The scene is at Memphis, the capital of ancient Egypt, and at Thebes, at “the time of the Pharaohs”—rather an indefinite date.

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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ACT 1.—The curtain rises on the garden of the Royal Palace at Memphis. Ramfis, the high priest, enters to announce to Radamès, Captain of the Royal Guard, that the Ethiopians are in revolt. The sacred Isis has been consulted, and has named the warrior who is to crush the revolt. Radamès, in love with Aïda, hopes that *he* may be the leader chosen by the deity, so that, as his reward, he may have the hand of Aïda, the favourite slave of Princess Amneris, daughter of the King. Aïda is, however, much distressed at the situation; for the Ethiopian rebels are her kinsmen, and their King, Amonasro, is her father. Moreover, Amneris herself loves Radamès; and, his ambition realised (for the deity's choice had fallen on him), she and her unconscious rival, Aïda, speed him on his way to the temple to ask a blessing on his arms.

ACT 2.—This Act opens in a room in the palace of Amneris. Here Aïda confesses her love for Radamès. A violent scene of jealousy follows, interrupted by the triumphal return of Radamès after a victory over the unfortunate Aïda's father, who appears among a group of prisoners paraded in a procession. The Act ends with the King's unexpectedly giving his daughter Amneris to Radamès, as a reward for his success, much to the distress of Radamès, who wished for Aïda.

ACT 3.—Here we have Amonasro begging his daughter to steal from her lover, Radamès, the secret



'Thou my rival?  
What though it were so





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## “ A Æ D A ”

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of his military plans against the Ethiopians, who have again risen in rebellion. Aïda promises, hoping to fly to her own land with her father and her lover. She obtains the secret from Radamès, who is at once surprised and denounced by Amneris for his indiscretion.

ACT 4.—Amneris would now be revenged on Radamès. To make a last trial of his affection, she orders the guards to bring him to her presence. She then offers to secure his pardon by the King if he will accept her love. Radamès refuses, not caring to have life without Aïda. He is therefore sentenced to be buried alive in a vault beneath the temple. Aïda voluntarily joins him; and the curtain falls on their lamentations, and the expression of their hopes of meeting in a better world.

In “Aïda” we find a true wedding of text and music—sustained dramatic power, noble orchestration; in short, “everything that distinguishes the great Verdi of the third period from the paltry Verdi of his first period.” The work is powerful in characterisation, pathetic in sentiment, pure and elevated in style, dignified, solemn, and beautiful. Verdi’s sense of orchestral colour, always acute, had a fine opportunity of asserting itself in the Oriental subject, so remote from the usual operatic groove, and he used it to remarkable effect. Local colour is often a dangerous stumbling-block to composers, but in “Aïda” Verdi triumphed most where most

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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had failed. Mr. Streatfeild's analysis brings this out very clearly. In the scene of the consecration of Radamès, Verdi employs two genuine Oriental tunes with such consummate art that this scene is not only one of the few instances in the history of opera in which Oriental colour has been successfully employed, but, in the opinion of many, the most beautiful part of the opera. Another splendid scene is the judgment of Radamès, already referred to, in the fourth Act, where an extraordinary effect is gained by the contrast of the solemn voices of the priests within the chamber with the passionate grief of Amneris on the threshold. The love scene in the third Act shows the lyrical side of Verdi's genius in its most voluptuous aspect. The picture of the palm-clad island of Philae and the dreaming bosom of the Nile is almost divinely mirrored in the score. The music seems to be steeped in the odorous charm of the warm southern night.

“Aïda” was first produced, at Cairo, on December 24, 1871. When Verdi announced that his score was finished, he was offered money, honours, and decorations if he would go to Egypt and conduct it in person. But Verdi was quite content with the £4000 already paid for the work. Like Rossini and Grieg, he had a horror of the sea, and nothing would tempt him to make the voyage. And when professional critics went to Cairo to witness the

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## “ A Ï D A ”

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performance and to report home, he was disgusted. Thus, to one he wrote, on the eve of his departure :

It seems to me that art looked at in this way is no longer art, but a trade, a party of pleasure, a hunt, anything that can be run after, to which it is desired to give, if not success, at least notoriety at any price. . . . I always call to mind with joy the early days of my career, the time when, with hardly a friend, with no one to talk about me, without preparation, without influence of any sort, I presented myself before the public with my works, and very happy if I could succeed in producing some slight favourable impression. Now what a piece of work about an opera!!! This is deplorable, deeply deplorable.

It is to the critic to whom this was addressed that we owe the essential facts about the Cairo performance. He tells that the curiosity, the madness of the Egyptian public to hear “Aïda” were such that all the seats were bought up a fortnight before, and at the last moment speculators “sold boxes and stalls for their weight in gold.” The spacious theatre, crowded from top to bottom, “blazed with fantastic dresses and showy uniforms, and the curtain rose on a drama which gave a glimpse to the Arabs, Copts, and Franks present of the life and religion, the loves and the hates of ancient Pharaonic times.” When it was all over, not a single voice was heard to dissent against the universal verdict of success.

“Aïda” was represented at Milan soon after its production at Cairo, and there also its reception was

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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brilliant and spontaneous. The opera rapidly made the tour of Italy and excited general enthusiasm. Only one protest is recorded, and it was so novel that it must be mentioned. A certain person named Bertoni went from a neighbouring village to hear the opera. His outing, including supper, cost him 15 francs 19 centimes. He happened not to like "Aïda." However, next day, hearing it praised on all hands, he resolved to give it another trial. This time he spent 20 francs, and was no better pleased. Full of wrath, he wrote to Verdi telling him that the opera was a failure, and asking for the return of 35 francs 90 centimes, which sum, he alleged, he had wasted in going to hear it. Verdi was not offended; in fact, he sided with the aggrieved one. Taking a pen in hand, he authorised his publisher to send Bertoni 31 francs 50 centimes, adding: "It is not quite so much as the gentleman demands, but then he could have had his supper at home." The story may not be true, but, as a witty Frenchman once said of a similar tale, *Si non è Verdi è ben Trovatore.*

## PONCHIELLI'S "LA GIOCONDA"

AMILCARE PONCHIELLI is celebrated in Dr. Riemann's "Dictionary of Music" as "next to Verdi, the most famous of modern Italian opera composers." Yet, of the considerable number of operas which he wrote, only "La Gioconda," produced at Milan in 1876, has "found its way into foreign lands." Verdi, especially in his "Aïda," certainly had an influence on Ponchielli; but much has happened, even in Italian opera, since "Gioconda" was written, though that work still figures in the repertory.

The story, a melodrama of the most pronounced type, is founded on Victor Hugo's "Angelo." It deals with the fortunes of a Venetian street-singer, especially with her love for the fickle Enzo. Enzo intrigues with another woman, but La Gioconda is generous enough to save both him and his mistress from the vengeance of the latter's husband. In the end she kills herself in order to escape falling into the hands of Barnaba, the spy.

Ponchielli had a strong individual musical and dramatic temperament. "Gioconda" is, on the whole, his best opera. It is remarkable for fine, broad melodies, gay and rhythmic measures, and picturesque orchestration; while as a spectacle the scenes, as mounted at Covent Garden, surpass in brilliancy those of "Aïda." Ponchielli was born near Cremona in 1834, and died in 1886.

## ROSSINI'S "BARBER" AND "TELL"

### THE COMPOSER

OF necessity the change in musical taste has pushed the old Italian masters of opera into the background. But they are by no means totally neglected. Wagner has not captured all the opera-goers! There are still a vast number who recognise charm of melody and clearness of musical form, and prefer an opera in which voices and orchestra are used with discrimination and taste, neither striving for mastery over the other. In spite of great advances, many still take the view that Haydn took when he wrote:

Let your air be good, and your composition, whatever it be, will be so likewise, and will assuredly delight. It is the soul of music, the life, the spirit, the essence of a composition. Without it theorists may succeed in discovering and using the most singular chords and combinations, but nothing is heard after all but a laboured sound, which, though it may not vex the ear, leaves the head empty and the heart cold and unaffected by it.

To those who agree with Haydn the Rossini school is always welcome. Its chief exponents, besides Rossini himself, were Donizetti and Bellini,

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## THE COMPOSER

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and the surviving operas of the three may now be considered.

Gioacchino Antonio Rossini was born at Pesaro on February 29, 1792, the son of a horn-player. The leap-year advent took his humorous fancy. He counted his birthday only once in four years, and, when he was seventy-two, he facetiously invited his friends to celebrate his eighteenth birthday. He made his stage *début* with an opera when he was eighteen, and had written five operas before he was twenty. When twenty-one, his "Tancredi" was produced at Venice, to achieve an instant success, and when he followed with "L'Italiana in Algeri," the Italians hailed him as their greatest living opera composer. Then, in 1816, came his triumph with "Il Barbiere di Seviglia," the crown of all Italian buffo operas.

Various other works succeeded this masterpiece, including "La Gazza Ladra" and "Semiramide" (a work of broad and noble dimensions, unjustly neglected); but it was not until 1829 that he produced "William Tell," the second of his operas which have lived. He had taken up his residence in Paris by this time, and had become "quite a Frenchman." But he had amassed a fortune by his operas (he made £7000 during a single visit to London), and though he was only thirty-seven when he wrote "Tell," he grew lazy, and for the remaining years of his life wrote nothing of any importance but his

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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famous "Stabat Mater." He spoke of himself as having "a passion for idleness." After 1836 he withdrew to Italy. The insurrection of 1848 troubled him, and he had to escape from the insurgents to Florence. In 1853 he returned to Paris, where he lived till his death in 1868.

Rossini was a great humorist, and his *bons mots* are legion. Like Ruskin he hated railways, and used a caravan. He was fat as Falstaff, a prodigious snuffer, and wore a wig. Amateur composers constantly worried him, and he did not bear them gladly. One such once sent him the MS. of his latest composition, accompanied by a Stilton cheese, of which he knew Rossini to be fond. He hoped, of course, for a letter praising the work. The letter came, but all it said was: "Thanks, I like the cheese very much." Rossini had a fastidious palate, and declared that he could himself cook rice and macaroni better than any one he knew. It was his joke to say that he and Meyerbeer could never agree because Meyerbeer liked sauerkraut better than macaroni.

He had scant respect for most of his brother composers. He seldom went to the Opera, but he went once to hear "Tannhäuser," and when asked his opinion of it, said: "It is too important and too elaborate to be judged after a single hearing, but I shall not give it a second." Somebody once handed him the score of another Wagner music-drama, and



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## “THE BARBER OF SEVILLE”

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presently remarked that he was holding the music upside down. “Well,” he replied, “I have already read it the other way, and am trying this, as I can make nothing of it.” He conceived the idea that Meyerbeer did not like him, and meeting his brother composer one day, he laid off a long catalogue of his (Rossini’s) physical ills, declaring he felt sure he had not long to live. After they parted, a friend who had been with Rossini remonstrated with him for his levity. “Well,” he said, “it is every good man’s duty to contribute to the peace and comfort of his fellow-man; and you know nothing would delight Meyerbeer more than to hear of my early decease.”

Such was the composer of “The Barber” and “Tell.” He had a tremendous vogue at one period, and even overshadowed Beethoven. The number of his operas, mostly forgotten now, is prodigious. But the fever long raged. Of thirteen operas performed at the King’s Theatre, London, in 1826, eight were by Rossini. All over Europe Rossini was conqueror—in popularity the Wagner of his time.

## “THE BARBER OF SEVILLE”

The libretto of this comic masterpiece is founded on Beaumarchais’ comedy of the same name. It was prepared by the poet Sterbini, who

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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lived in the same house with Rossini while the work was in progress. Briefly, the story is as follows :

The ardent Count Almaviva has fallen in love with Rosina, the pretty ward of Doctor Bartolo, who wants to marry her himself. So far, Almaviva is known to her only under the assumed name of Lindoro. After a serenade and an exchange of letters, he disguises himself as a tipsy dragoon, and manages to get into Bartolo's house by aid of the factotum Figaro. But his stratagem is foiled by the entrance of the guard, who arrest the would-be wooer and carry him to gaol. In the second Act he appears as deputy for Basilio, the singing-master, said to be sick. In order, however, to gain the suspicious Bartolo's confidence, he produces one of Rosina's letters to himself, declaring that it was given him by a mistress of Almaviva. Bartolo thinks he will inflame Rosina's jealousy by telling the scandal to Rosina, whose disappointment nearly frustrates Almaviva's deep-laid schemes. Happily, Almaviva secures an interview with Rosina, convinces her of his constancy, and induces her to elope before Bartolo discovers the trick that has been played upon him.

The music of this immortal work is too well known to require detailed analysis. It exhibits the composer in his gayest and most exhilarating mood, and sparkles with wit and fancy. Amongst its most familiar numbers are the Count's serenade, Figaro's celebrated description of his various duties, Basilio's

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## “THE BARBER OF SEVILLE”

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plotting aria, Rosina's chamber aria, the ingenious dragoon finale of the first Act, and the music-lesson. The delicate trio, “Zitti Zitti,” is a much-appreciated number; but the melody of this is taken, note for note, from Simon's air in Haydn's “Seasons.” The overture, as now played, was not originally composed for the opera, but had done varied service in other directions.

Rossini wrote “The Barber” to the commission of the manager of the Argentina Theatre, at Rome, where it was first produced in February 1816. According to contract, it had to be finished by a very near date, and for thirteen days poet and composer had scarcely time to eat, while they slept—on a sofa—only when they could no longer keep their eyes open. Rossini did not even stop to shave, and when some wit remarked on the strange fact that “The Barber” should cause him to let his beard grow, he replied that to get shaved meant going out, and if he went out he would not return so soon as he ought. The statement, frequently made, that the entire opera was written in thirteen days is doubtfully correct, but the time was certainly within a month. Rossini declared that he received just £60 from the Argentina for the work. That sum did not compensate him, he said, for the agony he endured at the *première*.

The “agony” was probably not acute, for Rossini took such things very philosophically. But

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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assuredly there was cause for agony. It so happened that Paisiello, a living composer in good local repute, had made an opera on the same subject thirty-six years before; and his admirers would not forgive the young Rossini for presuming to do better, or even differently. It was said that Paisiello looked confidently forward to Rossini's failure, and was even prepared to help towards it himself. At any rate, the audience came primed for a row.

Circumstances were on their side. First, and apart from their allegiance to Paisiello, they were used in the way of buffo music to the style in which the pathetic often mingles with and sometimes effaces the comic. Then, to make matters worse, Rossini wore a coat the texture and colour of which displeased them—a kind of vicuna. Again, when Almaviva entered to sing his serenade to Rosina, all the strings of his guitar snapped. A few minutes later, the like mishap befell Figaro's instrument; and instead of tripping sedately on to the stage, Basilio made his entrance head foremost. Picking himself up, he made the mistake of wiping the blood flowing from his nose with his gown.

As if this were not enough, the finely built concerted piece which closes the first Act was just beginning when a cat appeared on the stage. Chased in one direction by Figaro, in another by Bartolo, in a third by Basilio, the animal, in a wild endeavour to escape, ran into the skirt of Rosina's dress. In

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## “WILLIAM TELL”

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a word, the cat and not the music received the attention of the audience, who laughed uproariously. Then the storm broke; but instead of bowing his head to it, Rossini rose from the piano, at which composers then presided, and not only applauded his interpreters, but with a gesture asked the audience to do the same! The whole thing ended in hissing and hooting. But Rossini remained perfectly calm. He went home to bed, and, when the principal singers called in half-an-hour, he was fast asleep.

At the second performance, “The Barber” was comparatively well received. Being then actually *heard*, it was naturally admired. After a few representations it began to excite enthusiasm, and in a little over a week it was being received nightly with “frantic applause.” By-and-by it not only took the musical world by storm, but it has kept the stage to the present day, though its appearances are few and far between.

## “WILLIAM TELL”

Of all Rossini’s tragic operas, “William Tell” has alone retained the regard of the public. It is founded, needless to say, on the well-known story of Tell and his endeavours to relieve his countrymen, the Swiss, from Austrian domination. Several pens were engaged on the somewhat tedious libretto,

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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Rossini's amongst them, but all followed Schiller in the main.

Leutold, having killed an Austrian soldier in revenge for his child's abduction, is flying for safety. Tell succours him, and this incurs the wrath of Gessler, the Austrian despot. Melchtal, the patriarch of the village, suffers death, by Gessler's orders, for alleged insubordination. His son Arnold is in love with Matilda, Gessler's sister, and hesitates between love and duty. Finally he joins Tell and the other conspirators in an oath of vengeance. An excited, warlike scene follows, with the cry "To arms!" To discover the plotters, Gessler demands obeisance to his hat, which is placed on a pole in the square. Here comes the famous archery scene. Tell refuses homage to the hat, and is ordered to shoot the apple from his son's head. He accomplishes the perilous feat, but discloses a second arrow, with which, he declares, he meant to despatch Gessler had he killed his son. For this he is thrown into prison. Then Arnold raises a band of sympathisers and rescues Tell; Tell kills Gessler; and Arnold and Matilda are united,

"William Tell," though never Rossini's most popular work, is in many respects his finest. It was written in a style entirely different from anything he had previously attempted. As Fétis said, "the work displays a new man in an old one, and proves that it is in vain to measure the action of genius." It is

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## “WILLIAM TELL”

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simple, emotional, and eminently dramatic. Here the singer has not so much to display vocal agility as to express human feeling. It has a seriousness, in keeping with the subject, that contrasts to advantage with the flimsy style of the conventional operas which Rossini turned out like a machine. “The choral and instrumental parts,” says Mr. Streatfeild, “are particularly important; the latter especially have a colour and variety which may be considered to have had a large share in forming the taste for delicate orchestral effects for which modern composers are famous.” The brilliant overture, with its thunderstorm, its Swiss “Ranz de Vaches,” and its trumpet calls, is a familiar and widely appreciated number on the concert platform.

“Tell” was written for the Grand Opera in Paris, where it was first produced in August 1829. The audience received it with comparative indifference, but Rossini had become quite callous about first-night opinion. Ten minutes after the curtain had fallen he appeared in the librettist’s drawing-room, cool as a cucumber. “Well?” they asked him. “Well,” he said, “it’s a quasi-fiasco. The overture went magnificently; there were several splendid effects in the first Act; and the whole of the second was an unbroken triumph. But the third and fourth were very coldly received. It is a quasi-fiasco.” He did not tell his friends that at the close of the performance the Director of the Opera had expressed

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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himself as so disgusted that he sent for Rossini and declared he must annul a contract made with him for certain other works. "Don't worry yourself, my good monsieur," said Rossini; "I'll cancel the contract at once, and, if you like, I'll add that I'll never write another opera as long as I live." Unfortunately he kept his word.

There are many stories connected with "Tell." It was always too long, and, even in Paris, soon after its production the management began to perform only one Act at a time. "I hope you won't be annoyed," said the manager to Rossini one morning, "but to-night we propose to perform the second Act." "What! the whole of it?" asked Rossini in reply. The original "Tell" was in five Acts; now it is always played in three.



## DONIZETTI SURVIVALS

### THE COMPOSER

ROSSINI'S withdrawal from creative work was a boon to Donizetti and Bellini. It gave them a chance, of which they eagerly availed themselves. Though born at Bergamo (in 1797), Donizetti was of Scottish descent, a fact which should be remembered in listening to his "Lucia." His grandfather, a Perthshire man named Izett, had joined the army and was taken prisoner by General la Hoche during the latter's invasion of Ireland. He became the General's private secretary, drifted to Italy, married an Italian lady, and denationalised his name into Donizetti.

The composer produced his first opera in 1818, at Venice. In 1834 he was appointed a professor in the Naples Conservatoire, but held the post only a few years. In 1842 he accepted a post at Vienna once held by Mozart. Symptoms of mental disorder subsequently appeared, and a severe attack of paralysis disabled him. During his last years he suffered from dominating fits of despondency, and he had become almost a wreck when he died in 1847. Before the funeral a doctor stole his skull, which was afterwards found in use as a butcher's money-bowl!

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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Donizetti wrote the incredible number of seventy operas. He had an even more fatal facility than Rossini, and could turn out three or four operas a year. There are many stories of the rapidity of his composition. Sir Charles Hallé, who met him in Paris in 1840, and has left a description of him as “a most distinguished, amiable, and fashionable gentleman, as elegant as his music,” tells how he asked him one day if Rossini had really composed “The Barber” in a fortnight. “Oh, I quite believe it,” said Donizetti; “he has always been such a lazy fellow.” The anecdote is significant. Donizetti possessed dramatic instinct, and his flow of melody was wellnigh inexhaustible. But most of his music is of a superficial character. He wrote to please the public. He had to get a living, and, by studying the public taste, he found it easy to earn large sums of money. In one letter he says he can make by opera 2000 ducats in three months. Now only five out of his seventy operas survive. We may take them in the order of their production.

### “LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR”

This opera, which Rossini regarded as the summit of Donizetti's achievement, was composed in six weeks. It was first produced at Naples in 1835, was received with enthusiasm, and soon became

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## “LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR”

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popular throughout Europe. The libretto, “fierce and tragic,” is an Italianised version of Scott’s “Bride of Lammermoor,” and follows the novel pretty closely.

Sir Henry Ashton, Lord of Lammermoor, wishes his sister Lucy to marry Lord Arthur Bucklaw, for financial and political reasons, though she is engaged to Edgar of Ravenswood. By means of a forged letter Bucklaw deceives Sir Henry into believing that Edgar, the hereditary enemy of the family, loves another. Lucy therefore consents to marry Bucklaw. As she is signing the contract, Edgar suddenly appears and reveals the truth. Lucy, mad with grief, kills Bucklaw, and on recovery dies of horror at her crime. Edgar, hearing of the calamity, plunges the dagger into his breast and ends his existence. This is a variation from the novel, where Edgar loses himself on the seashore and is drowned.

The part of Lucia used to be beloved by all the operatic light sopranos, and, in the days of the great tenors, that of Edgardo was even more popular. “When the Lucia of the evening is Patti, Nilsson, or Albani,” wrote Mr. Sutherland Edwards thirty years ago, “and the Edgardo is no one in particular, the final scene falls flat; no one, indeed, stops to hear it. But the case was quite different when the part of Edgardo was filled by a great dramatic vocalist like Duprez, or in later days by Mario.”

“Lucia” was for many years one of the most

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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popular works at Covent Garden, but it has now "come down to the level of a mere prima donna's opera, to be revived once or twice a year in order to give a popular singer an opportunity for vocal display." Some of its melodies can only be described as sugary, but others are fresh and expressive. Here and there are passages of real dramatic power; notably the sextet in the second Act, "Chi mi frena," and the lyrical lament in which Edgar invokes the spirits of his forefathers. The dramatic finale at the end of the second Act is broadly conceived and well constructed.

### "LUCREZIA BORGIA"

This opera was written for Milan in 1834, but was not produced till 1840. It was long popular with audiences of all kinds; partly for its music, no doubt, but partly also because the cast, to be satisfactory, must always include four leading singers.

The libretto is based on one of Victor Hugo's most dramatic plays, and the theme is, of course, the crimes of the notorious Italian poisoner. Lucrezia Borgia, the wife of the Duke of Ferrara, recognises Gennaro, a young Venetian, as an illegitimate child of her own, and watches over him with a maternal instinct which her husband, ignorant of the relationship, mistakes for illicit passion. Gennaro, taunted

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## “LA FILLE DU REGIMENT”

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by his friends about Lucrezia's attentions, publicly insults her, and being brought before the Duke for the offence, is condemned to death. Gennaro is poisoned in presence of his mother, who, however, promptly administers an effective antidote. In the last Act Lucrezia, seeking to be revenged on her son's friends for their gibes, poisons the wine at a supper party. Unluckily Gennaro is present and drinks the wine with the rest. This time he refuses an antidote, and dies in his mother's arms. Lucrezia, conscience-stricken, dies also—for the convenience of the librettist.

Of the music the usual thing has to be said, that it embraces a great number of tuneful melodies, often entirely inappropriate. There is a touch of pathos here and there, as in the last scene, and some fairly effective concerted writing. But, for the most part, the “charming tunes” are without any dramatic significance.

## “LA FILLE DU REGIMENT”

The scene of this opera is laid in the Tyrol. Years before the story opens, Marie had been found, after a battle, by Sergeant Sulpice of the 11th Regiment of the Grand Army of Napoleon. Taking a fancy to the child, he adopted her, or rather, induced his regiment to do so. Marie is now a fine

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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young woman. Matters are in this situation when she is rescued from impending death by a Tyrolese peasant named Tonio. The pair fall in love; but the regiment has the right of determining Marie's marriage suitor, and Tonio is required to join the regiment in order to secure her hand. Everything is going right, when suddenly the Marchioness of Berkenfeld appears and identifies Marie as her long-lost niece. So Marie is carried off to the castle of the Marchioness, and Tonio is left lamenting. Subsequently the regiment, with Tonio at its head, arrives in the neighbourhood of the castle. But the Marchioness is still determined against the low-born lover, and Marie, in an agony of grief, consents to part with him. Later on, at the psychological moment, the Marchioness relents, and Tonio's constancy is rewarded in the usual way.

"La Fille" is full of smooth, melodious, and animated music, but there is nothing striking requiring comment.

### "LA FAVORITA"

"La Favorita," produced in Paris in 1840, is generally allowed to be, in many ways, the strongest of Donizetti's tragic works. The story—not very inviting—is based on a French drama, which again owed its origin to a Spanish work.

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## “DON PASQUALE”

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A youthful cavalier, Fernando, is about to take monastic vows, when the monks are amazed to hear him confessing that this would be against his conscience. The fact is, he has caught sight of a fair penitent, who turns out to be Leonora, the King's mistress, “La Favorita.” Leonora reciprocates his passion, and to give him a chance of proving his chivalry, gets him a commission in the army. He returns with glory from the fight, and the King, tired by this time of his attachment, rewards him with the hand of Leonora. After the marriage Fernando learns of Leonora's past, and in disgust returns to the convent. Leonora follows, and, seeking and obtaining forgiveness, expires in his arms.

Historians of the opera all deal favourably with the music of “La Favorita.” They remark the duet in the first Act for Fernando and the chief of the monastery; the graceful and melodious choruses of women, and the ballet music in the second Act; the King's air, “Pour tant d'amour,” in the third Act; and the whole of the fourth Act, which is indeed worth all the rest of the opera. The story is in all the books of how Donizetti wrote this Act in about three hours.

## “DON PASQUALE”

There is much genuine humour in this opera buffa. The plot turns upon a trick played by

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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Ernesto and Norina, a pair of lovers, upon Ernesto's uncle and guardian, Don Pasquale. Ernesto will not marry a certain rich young lady as his uncle wants him; so Pasquale determines to disinherit him, and, to secure an heir for his wealth, decides to marry himself. With the connivance of a friend, a Dr. Malatesta, Ernesto gets his sweetheart, Norina, to receive Pasquale's attentions. The old gentleman succumbs to her charms; but, when the marriage contract has been signed, she so staggers him by her assumed shrewishness and extravagance that he is glad to give her up to his nephew.

The opera is especially interesting for the fact that it was written for that incomparable quartet, Grisi, Mario, Tamburini, and Lablache. It was first produced at the Théâtre des Italiens in Paris in January 1843. In June following it reached London and became a great popular success. After an interval of nearly twenty-four years from the previous last performance, London heard it again—a large audience, too—in 1905. The music has been described as “flimsy to a degree,” but the unaffected brightness and gaiety of the opera still give pleasure.



# BELLINI'S BEST

## THE COMPOSER

THE name of Vincenzo Bellini stands high among the Italian opera composers of the early nineteenth century. Other times, other music, of course; and we feel that Bellini essentially belongs to the past. But three of the ten operas he wrote are still in the repertoire, and more ought to be. For, as Mr. Streatfeild says, "It is matter for regret that Bellini's works should now be entirely banished from the Covent Garden repertoire while so many inferior operas are still retained. In an age of fustian and balderdash, Bellini stood apart, a tender and pathetic figure, with no pretensions to science, but gifted with a stream of melody as copious, unaffected, and sincere as has ever fallen to the lot of a composer for the stage."

Bellini was born at Catania, in Sicily, in 1802. He became a pupil of the Naples Conservatoire, and the weakness of his technique is generally attributed to the fact that his teacher there was an octogenarian. When he began writing for the stage, Rossini was at the height of his fame. But Bellini had conquered the public before Rossini practically finished his life-

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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work with "Tell." His first opera was produced in 1825, but it was not till 1831 that he achieved a lasting success with "La Sonnambula." "Norma" followed in the same year, and, in 1835, "I Puritani." And then Bellini's work was done. He had been in London for several months in 1833, and was much made of by the aristocracy. But his brief career ended in 1835, when he was only thirty-three; while a brother, a fourth-rate church composer, lived to be eighty-two. His untimely end created deep regret, and found expression in many notices and memorial pamphlets. He was, as his friend Greville said, "a simple-minded, amiable fellow, with a capital understanding, and a strong perception of the ridiculous."

### "LA SONNAMBULA"

"La Sonnambula" was first produced at the Teatro Careano, Milan, in March 1831. The libretto, by Romani, the foremost Italian librettist of the time, sets forth a rather childish if simple and natural story of lowly life in a Swiss village. The heroine, Amina, is a rustic damsel who walks in her sleep. Rodolfo, the young lord of the village, has just returned from abroad, and Amina, in her sleep, enters his room at the inn. Amina's wedding to Elvino, a wealthy landowner, was just about to be celebrated. But

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## “LA SONNAMBULA”

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now the jealous Lisa, the pretty hostess of the inn, denounces Amina, and herself gains the temporary regard of Elvino. Rodolfo proclaims Amina's innocence, but nobody believes him until Amina is seen walking in her sleep, this time over a slim bridge above the mill-wheel. Her innocence is thus confirmed, and the conventional happy ending is assured.

Of the music there is not much to say except that the melodies, if somewhat characterless, are graceful and pleasing; some of them full of real emotion, the subject being perfectly suited to Bellini's idyllic and elegiac style. There is undoubted power in the closing scene, and Amina's air, "Oh, recall not," has long been a favourite with singers and listeners. Virtually, the opera is a vocal recital with stage accessories. The public go to hear the prima donna. When the work was first given in London, in 1833, the writer of a notice in *The Harmonicon* declared that the music was "of the most flimsy kind, and worthless in every sense of the word, whether as relates to art or to the theatre." But the public paid little heed to the critics. They liked Bellini's endless flow of melody, and they made the opera a complete success. In England it was performed, in English and in Italian, oftener than any other two or perhaps three operas; while probably no songs, certainly no songs by a foreign composer, were ever sold in such numbers as "All is lost" and "Do not mingle." The

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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part of Amina, it may be added, was selected by Patti and Albani for their first appearance before an English public.

### “NORMA ”

Here, again, the libretto is the work of Romani. It has been eulogised as “of great power and beauty; a tragedy which, both in sentiment and diction, contrasts very strongly with the ungrammatical balderdash which composers are so often called upon to set to music.”

The scene is laid in Gaul, recently subjugated by the Romans. Norma, high-priestess of the Druids, has been clandestinely married to Pollio, the Roman pro-consul, and has borne him twelve children. Pollio proves unfaithful, having conceived a violent passion for Adalgisa, a young virgin of the temple. She is won by his protestations, and flies with him to Rome; but her conscience smites her, and she makes a full confession to Norma. Norma generously wants to send Adalgisa to Pollio, but Adalgisa refuses the offer; promising instead to bring Pollio back repentant. Pollio, however, embroils the Druids by following Adalgisa into the temple and trying to tear her from the altar. In the struggle he is captured and sentenced to death. Norma magnanimously promises to save him if he will renounce Adalgisa,

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## “ N O R M A ”

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but he declines. Out of compassion for him, Norma proclaims herself the guilty one and demands to be led to death. This brings Pollio to a sense of her worth and devotion, and the pair mount the funeral pyre together, to be cleansed by fire from earthly sin.

“Norma,” first produced in 1831, is a “singing opera” of the old type, but its melodies are broad and sustained rather than florid. They have no pretence to dramatic consistency, but there is real feeling in several of the numbers, especially in Norma’s great prayer, “Casta Diva” (remarkable for its truth and beauty and dignified sweetness), and her farewell to her children at the close. Parts of the opera have, for Bellini, an unexpected fervour and dignity. The orchestration is thin, as it is in all his operas; but Cherubini was right when he said that fuller accompaniments would not improve Bellini’s lovely melodies. Bizet is said to have tried to re-score “Norma,” but gave it up as impossible.

It seems to be the general opinion that “Norma” is the work in which Bellini best displayed his gifts. He himself called it “the best of my operas.” Rossini admired it; and for a very long period no great singer with any pretence to tragic power considered her claims fully recognised till she succeeded in the part of the Druid priestess. Of this character Pasta was the first notable exponent; later it became one of Grisi’s favourite parts and Titiens also had a fancy for it.

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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Even Wagner praised the rich flow of the "Norma" melody, adding that "the most determined opponents of the new Italian school of music do this composition the justice of admitting that, speaking to the heart, it shows an inner earnestness of aim." Further, he showed his practical interest by selecting it for his benefit when he was conductor at Riga in 1837. Wagner always spoke highly of Bellini's light, spontaneous melody. Lord Mount-Edgumbe, a celebrated connoisseur and admirer of the old school, tells that when "Norma" was first produced in London it "was not liked." However that may have been, it was certainly a good deal liked afterwards.

### "I PURITANI"

The text of this opera was prepared by Count Pepoli from a poor novel, Ancelot's "Les Puritains d'Ecosse." It is dull and confused, as Bellini himself admitted. "Poor Pepoli," he wrote, "was new to this trade, and did his best." But the libretto, he airily added, "did no harm to the opera, since few people understand Italian."

The story is founded on historical events between the Royalists and the Puritans at the time of the Civil War. It deals mainly with Lord Arthur Talbot's love for Elvira, daughter of Lord Walter

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## “I PURITANI”

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Walton, the Puritan governor of Plymouth fortress. Queen Henrietta Maria is confined in the fortress by Cromwell's orders. Talbot, who is a cavalier, effects the Queen's escape; and Elvira, believing him faithless, goes harmlessly mad. Talbot is subsequently arrested and ordered to be shot, but his pardon arrives in the nick of time. Then Elvira promptly and conveniently recovers her reason, and the pair are reunited.

As in the two operas already dealt with, Bellini here displays a wealth of expressive melodic material. Many of the songs have an almost pathetic beauty. The romance in the first Act, “A te, O Cara”; the polacca, the grand duet and the tenor solo of the closing concerted piece, produced the greatest enthusiasm at one time. The last movement of the duet was treated by “arrangers” for the piano in every conceivable form. This is the movement (“destined too soon,” said one, “to find favour in the eyes of omnibus-conductors and all the worst amateurs of the cornet”) of which Rossini wrote from Paris to a friend at Milan: “I need not describe the duet for two basses; you must have heard it where you are.” This may have been a hit at the brazen accompaniments.

“I Puritani” was written to order for the Théâtre Italiens, in Paris, and produced there in 1835, with such stars as Grisi, Rubini, Tamburini, and Lablache in the cast. It was staged in London next year for

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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Grisi's benefit, and proved such a success that for long years old habitués used to speak of the "Puritani" season as one of the most brilliant in their experience. "I Puritani" was Bellini's last opera. Immediately after his death, in September 1835, the Théâtre Italiens reopened with it. The beautiful tenor air in the third Act was sung at his funeral to the words of the "Lachrymosa."



## FLOTOW'S "MARTHA"

A SHORT notice of this work can hardly be omitted, and it seems to be best in place here. A "Critical History of Opera" has recently been written (in America, certainly) in which the name of Flotow is not even mentioned. And yet, Flotow's "Martha," once popular everywhere, has still a place on the borders of the living operatic land. It is one of the operas which Mr. Charles Manners, suggesting a list for the present volume, expressly mentioned as being "always acceptable" to his patrons.

Friedrich Flotow was a German (born in 1812, the son of a landed nobleman), and he has sometimes been classed with composers of the German romantic school. But it is more convenient to place him with Rossini and his followers, since, as Mr. Streatfeild puts it, his music is "merely a feeble imitation of the popular Italianisms of his day." He established himself in Paris in 1827, and one opera produced there, in 1839, ran for fifty-three nights in twelve months. From 1856 to 1863 he was intendant of the Court Theatre at Schwerin, but he lived near Vienna from 1868 till his death in 1883.

The action of "Martha" takes place in England

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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during the reign of Queen Anne; and the story is that of a freakish beauty of high rank, Lady Henrietta, who disguises herself as a peasant, calls herself Martha, and, with her maid Betsy, similarly disguised, joins a crowd of girls going to the hiring fair at Richmond. Two young farmers, Plunkett and Lionel, engage Martha and her companion for twelve months. They do not like their situation, and escape the same night, aided by an uncouth cavalier who, also disguised, had escorted them to Richmond. The two farmers, in the short space of time, had fallen desperately in love with the girls, and four Acts are required to show how the passion proceeds. In the end Martha, who has reassumed her proper rank, discovers that Lionel is the son and heir of a peer, and they are espoused. Plunkett at the same time is wedded to Betsy, and the curtain descends on two pairs of happy lovers.

It was at Vienna that "Martha" was first produced in November 1847. It "quickly spread all over the world," though London did not hear it till 1858. The success which it attained may be ascribed chiefly to the "trivial tunefulness" of the melodies, and to the light and attractive character of the work generally. There is plenty of lively and well-accentuated rhythm; the harmonies are often pleasing; and the orchestration is piquant. But the score is not of much musical interest.

When "Martha" was mentioned to its composer,

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## FLOTOW'S "MARTHA"

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it was generally to eulogise "The Last Rose of Summer," to the mortification of poor Flotow, whose only merit as regards this popular Irish air was that he had picked out and appositely placed it in his opera.

## BIZET'S "CARMEN"

### THE COMPOSER

GEORGES BIZET was born in Paris on October 25, 1838. He came of a musical family, his father being a singing-master, his mother a pianist. Georges proved himself something of a prodigy. He could distinguish the degrees of the scale as soon as the letters of the alphabet. When he was eight, his father took him in hand musically, and the boy showed such astonishing aptitude, that the delighted parent decided to send him to the Conservatoire. Unfortunately he was as yet too young, according to the rules, to be admitted there. Thinking over the matter, however, Bizet *père* concluded that if the Conservatoire authorities could only hear and test his boy, they would waive the question of age. So the pair had an interview with M. Meifred, a prominent member of the Conservatoire committee.

"Your child is very young," said Meifred, casting a supercilious glance at the little Georges. "That's true," replied the father, "but if he is small by measurement, he is great in knowledge." "Really! And what can he do?" "Place yourself at the piano, strike chords, and he will name them all with-



CARMEN



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## THE COMPOSER

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out a mistake." The test was applied with success. Other tests followed, and the result was that the doors of the Conservatoire opened to the gifted child out of due time. Bizet's student career was a series of distinguished triumphs. In 1851, at his first competition, he took second prize for piano, being then only thirteen, and next year he divided the first prize with another. Bizet was, in fact, so good a pianist as to excite (later) the praise of Liszt. Rapidly he rose to the highest place.

By-and-by Offenbach put an opera up to competition, promising to produce the successful work. Bizet tried his luck, and in the result was bracketed at the head of the competition with a class-mate, M. Lecocq, whose farcical operas were vastly popular at one time. Bizet went on to better things. He won, like his friend the composer of "Faust," the greatly coveted Prix de Rome at the Conservatoire, and in January 1858 set out for the Eternal City. There he studied hard for three years. Just as he got back to Paris his mother was dying. Under the stress of this bereavement, he settled down to make a living for himself, slaving at arrangements and transcriptions, very much as Wagner had done in that same gay capital. He composed "pot-boilers" — dance movements for orchestra, &c., &c., mean hack drudgery which he detested. "Be assured," he wrote to a friend, "that it is aggravating to interrupt my cherished work for two days to write

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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solos for the cornet-à-pistons. One must live." Again he tells that he is working fifteen or sixteen hours a day; "more sometimes," for he has lessons to give, proofs to correct. Once he says he has not slept for three nights. And yet again: "To be a musician nowadays one needs to have an assured and independent means of living, or genuine diplomatic talent." How true!

He had written an opera (not the first either), "La Jolie Fille de Perth," of which he expected much. It was produced in 1867, ran for twenty-one nights, and then disappeared from the stage, though the ballet music was subsequently incorporated in "Carmen." Two years later, in June 1869, Bizet married Geneviève, the daughter of his old composition-master at the Conservatoire, M. Halévy. In 1870 the Franco-German war broke out. Bizet was deeply distressed by this conflict. With the prevision of a seer he wrote: "And our poor philosophy, our dreams of universal peace, our world-wide fraternity, our federation of peoples! Instead of all this, tears, blood, heaps of carcasses, crimes without number, without end. . . . This war will cost humanity 500,000 lives. As for France, she will leave all in it. Alas!"

Bizet's next work was "Djamileh," produced without success in 1872. The composer admitted it was not a success. Nevertheless he said: "I am extremely satisfied with the results obtained. The



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## THE COMPOSER

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Press notices have been very interesting, for never has an *opéra-comique* in one Act been more seriously and, let me add, passionately discussed. . . . St. Victor, Jouvain, &c., have been favourable in the sense that they allow inspiration and talent, all spoiled by the influence of Wagner. That which satisfies me more than the opinion of these gentlemen is the absolute certainty that I have hit upon my right course. I know what I am doing."

Then followed the incidental music to Daudet's play "L'Arlesienne"; music of real merit and beauty, not unknown in the concert-room to-day. Daudet's play was carefully staged but ran only fourteen nights, much to the chagrin of the composer, who "thought he saw once more the condemnation to oblivion of some of his best music." However, M. Padeloup, the eminent Parisian conductor, struck by the beauty of the instrumental pieces, performed the Prelude, Minuet, Adagietto, and Carillon, and scored a success with them. The combination became known as a "Suite de Orchestra," and in England it has been generally familiar since Mme. Viard-Louis had it performed at one of her London concerts.

Bizet's next important effort was the "Patrie" overture, played for the first time at one of Padeloup's concerts, February 15, 1874. Bizet had called the piece simply a "dramatic overture"; Padeloup, with an eye to business, and realising that there is

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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more in a name than Juliet was willing to admit, gave it the title by which it is now known. This enlisted national feeling (the war was still remembered), and suggested in a single word what was avowedly Bizet's intention.

And then came "Carmen," by which alone Bizet must surely live. With this masterpiece he had completed his life-work, though he did not know it. The public, as has been told, received it with frigid indifference. But what of that? Bizet had faith in the future of his opera, and he set his face towards other achievements. Alas! he "fell with his foot on the threshold of Walhalla; at the very moment when his star was soaring upwards towards the meridian; just as victory seemed to be within his grasp." On the morning of June 3, 1875, it was whispered through Paris that Bizet had died the previous night. It seemed incredible to his friends that Fate should deal him such a cruel blow.

Confirmation of the report soon came. "Most horrible catastrophe! Our poor friend Bizet died to-night." So ran the telegram. The composer had been stricken suddenly, in his residence at Bougival, and had passed away with little suffering. He had been subject to angina from youth, and the disease became periodic. When it attacked him, he would shut himself in his room, and "quietly await the surcease of his pain, which, as a rule, lasted three or four days." The anxieties and the hard work con-

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## THE COMPOSER

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nected with "Carmen" had proved too much, and May brought an attack of longer duration than usual. At this season of the year Bizet and his family generally left Paris for Bougival. He insisted upon doing so now, despite his illness. "We will go at once," he said; "the air of Paris poisons me." Go he did, and the first day in the country passed off well, the invalid enjoying a walk with his wife and the pianist, Delaborde.

But the following night (Pigot is again the authority) was a horrible one. The poor master, haunted by dreadful visions, oppressed to suffocation, and in pain, could get no repose. The medical man who was hastily summoned did not, however, perceive danger. The same thing happened on the night following. They hesitated to trouble the physician a second time, but the symptoms became more urgent, and at last he was sent for. On his arrival, the patient lay calm and still. His wife believed him to be asleep. So he was, but the sleep was that which knows no waking. The hour of midnight sounded when he passed to the Silent Land, and in Paris they were lowering the curtain on the thirty-third representation of the dead man's masterpiece.

The funeral rites were performed on June 5 at Trinity Church, in presence of four thousand persons. Padeloup's orchestra attended in a body and performed the "Patrie" overture; the artists of the Opéra Comique assisted in the *Requiem*; and Gounod

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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officiated as one of the pall-bearers. There also were Guiraud, Massenet, Delaborde, and a host of representative men, "sincerely mourning the loss of one whose sun went down while it was yet day." At the close of the religious ceremonies the remains of the composer were laid to rest in the cemetery of Montmartre.

Georges Bizet was thus cut off in the very dawn of his career—taken early (at thirty-seven), like Mozart and Mendelssohn, like Chopin and Schubert, and our own Purcell. At thirty-seven Verdi had not yet produced "Trovatore"; Wagner was in exile, and "Lohengrin" unappreciated. Had Bizet lived for another thirty years, what might he not have done! As it was, he "achieved little because the opportunity was denied him, but in that little he accomplished much; giving to music the most original and successful opera of his day, and by a single effort earning undying fame."

Pigot tells that some time before his death—perhaps with a premonition of the end—Bizet made an *auto-da-fe* of every MS. which appeared to him short of perfection. He destroyed with pitiless hand all that seemed unworthy to survive; doubtless with injustice to works of incontestable interest and great artistic flavour. Luckily "Carmen" remains.

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## THE LIBRETTO

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### THE LIBRETTO

The essentially Spanish story of "Carmen" is told in the well-known novel bearing the same title, by Prosper Mérimée. It can be read in several of the now popular cheap reprints, and one who would enjoy the opera to the full should not miss the opportunity. Bizet's libretto was prepared from this work by Meilhac and Halévy. It may be well to summarise it in some detail.

ACT 1.—Carmen, a Spanish gipsy, of impulsive, untamed, sensual nature; fickle and wayward, yet with all the wild graces of her nation, first invites, then disdainfully repudiates her lovers, and in the end suffers a tragic fate. The scene of her story is laid in Seville, and the period is the early part of the nineteenth century—about 1820. The first of Carmen's lovers is Don José, a brigadier in the Spanish army, who is, however, betrothed to an innocent country damsel, Micaela. At the opening of the first Act Micaela arrives at the guard-house with a message to Don José from his mother. She finds that Don José is not with the band of soldiers waiting for the guard to be relieved; and the officer on duty vainly pleads with her to remain until Don José appears. Presently the relief guard arrives with Don José in the company. At the same time,

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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a body of young fellows assembles near the cigarette factory fronting the guard-house, to await the arrival of the cigarette girls. When the girls enter, the young fellows become excitedly interested in Carmen, the prettiest of the lot. Carmen will have none of their attentions. Her eyes have lighted on Don José, and with bewitching coquetry she singles him out and presents him with a bunch of flowers she has been wearing. Don José had hitherto been quite indifferent to Carmen, but the fascination of the gipsy is not to be resisted; and when the factory-bell rings, recalling the girls to work, the young brigadier has practically succumbed to her seductions.

His mind is filled with thoughts of Carmen when Micaela, his old love, returns, to hand him a purse, and tell him of his mother. The tender feelings called up by Micaela's presence, and by the memories of the old home, banish for a time the heated passion which Carmen has aroused. Don José will, as he tells himself, be faithful to Micaela and fulfil his mother's wishes. He is just about to cast aside the gipsy's flowers when a tumult is heard in the cigarette factory, and the girls rush out in mad excitement. There had been a quarrel, it appears, and Carmen has wounded one of her comrades. Carmen is seized, and as fate would have it, the officer in charge hands her over to the custody of Don José. Deciding to send her to prison, since she saucily declines to express contrition for what has happened,

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## THE LIBRETTO

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the officer sets off to procure a warrant for her detention. Thus Carmen and Don José are left alone. It is the gipsy's opportunity. She brings all her wiles, all her powers of fascination, to bear on the young soldier; with the inevitable result that he agrees to further her escape, and promises to meet her in the evening at an inn kept by a man named Liliás Pastia. The officer now returns with the order for imprisonment, and Carmen is marched away to gaol, with Don José and a couple of soldiers for escort. On the way, according to the preconcerted ruse, Carmen gives Don José a vigorous blow on the chest, and he falls head over heels purposely. In the confusion which naturally follows, Carmen, further aided by some girl-friends, gets clean away; and Don José himself, for his suspicious part in the affair, is degraded and sent to prison.

ACT 2.—When this Act opens we are at the inn before mentioned, on the outskirts of the town. Carmen is there with a band of gipsies and smugglers for associates. A number of the military are there too, Carmen being the peculiar object of their attention. It is now that we are introduced to Carmen's other suitor. This is Escamillo, the famous toreador, who arrives at the inn, and is eagerly hailed by all present. The bull-fighter is more energetic in his wooing than Don José (as one says, "he returns Carmen's love more passionately"); but here, at the inn, she treats him somewhat capriciously, at one

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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time receiving, at another time rejecting his advances. When the inn has closed, and Escamillo and the soldiers have taken their departure, two of the smugglers plead with Carmen to join them in a certain enterprise. Carmen declines. She says she must remain in Seville until José, with whom she has contrived to have communication, regains his freedom. On hearing this, the smugglers suggest that she should try to induce the brigadier to throw in his lot with the wandering tribe. Carmen agrees; and so, when Don José at length arrives, she employs all her arts of fascination to make him desert from his regiment. A keen sense of honour prevents him from yielding to this temptation; and he is just leaving Carmen when his superior officer, Zuniger, appears on the scene. The officer, jealous of Don José's place in Carmen's regard, haughtily orders the brigadier to "be off." This rouses the brigadier, and, drawing his sword, he challenges his superior. Carmen shouts for aid. It is the smugglers who answer her call. They disarm the officer and make him a prisoner, and Don José's career as a soldier is ended. He has no option but to fly to the mountains, and Carmen, with associate gipsies and smugglers, flies with him.

ACT 3.—Now we are with the gipsies and the smugglers, far away in the wild recesses of the hills. Night has fallen, and a dangerous enterprise is on hand. Carmen and Don José are there. The latter



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## THE LIBRETTO

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is even more infatuated than before, but Carmen's affection for him, always doubtful, has begun to wane. José has pangs of conscience, indeed; for he "belongs to another sphere of society, and his feelings are of a softer kind than those of Nature's unruly child." As a matter of fact, Carmen has already transferred her affections, such as they are, to Escamillo; and when Escamillo now arrives at the remote haunt where the object of his frenzied passion is entrenched, there is immediate trouble between the two rivals. The toreador, not recognising Don José, reveals to him his love for Carmen. Maddened by the avowal, Don José challenges him to mortal combat, and only the interference of Carmen and the smugglers prevents a tragedy. Escamillo departs, and Don José reproaches Carmen with her disloyalty. Carmen remains unmoved, either by his reproaches or his threats of revenge. Then Micaela reappears, with messages from Don José's lonely mother, who is dying. Will Don José not return to the old home to see the last of his beloved parent? A multitude of conflicting thoughts rush through his brain. At last the sense of filial duty prevails, and Don José consents to go with Micaela, though not without first breathing out wild imprecations on his rival and his faithless love.

ACT 4.—This Act takes place outside the Plaza de Toros at Seville. A great bull-fight has been arranged, and Escamillo is its hero. He has invited

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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the company to be present in the circus, and of course Carmen is among them, with her friends. Don José is present, too, having discharged the last sad duties to his mother. Carmen has been warned of the danger attending a meeting with her discarded lover. But Carmen knows no fear. She declines to conceal herself or to seek protection, and boldly faces José outside the arena. José "tries hard to touch her heart." He "kneels at her feet, vowing never to forsake her, and to be one of her own people." Carmen remains obdurate. She declares frankly and disdainfully that she has given her love to the toreador, whose triumphs are now being borne to her ears by the shouts of the multitude. Almost beside himself with defeated love and revengeful rage, Don José draws his dagger and stabs her to the heart. Fanfares and trumpets announce the approach of the victorious toreador. But there is no Carmen for Escamillo; Carmen lies dead upon the ground, with Don José, bereft of his senses, kneeling beside her.

### THE MUSIC

Musically, "Carmen" is prefaced by a short orchestral introduction, very free in form and not elaborate enough to be dignified by the title of overture. It is almost a literal transcription of the festive music announcing the bull-fight in the last



CARMEN AND JOSÉ

Act I. Sc. 5



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## THE MUSIC

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Act, including the short phrase in F sharp minor assigned to the children's chorus and the refrain of the Toreador's Song in the second Act. This "festive noise" is succeeded by a short movement, *andante moderato*, introducing a striking theme of two bars only, which is throughout the opera constantly associated with Carmen herself. The theme derives its striking effect, as the theoretical musician would tell us, from Bizet's use of an unusual musical interval—the "superfluous second." This interval is peculiar to the popular tunes of the gipsy tribe, hence its significance here. In addition, moreover, to its national import, the theme in question, to quote the late Francis Hueffer (to whose analysis I am much indebted) also "conveys a graphic idea of the waywardness of Bizet's frail heroine, while, at the same time, its weird harmonic colouring seems to forbode some strange doom." The theme is turned to account in the opera itself in a truly masterly way, and, if the listener identifies it in the prelude, he cannot well miss it when it recurs later.

When the curtain rises we are in the noise and bustle of a Spanish street. This is indicated by a lively theme of strongly marked rhythm, while the dragoons come in with a chorus of very original form. On the entrance of Micaela, the fair Navarraise, in quest of her José, we hear a simple expressive phrase meant specially for herself, after which the lively scene is resumed. The soldiers

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## F A V O U R I T E O P E R A S

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proffer gallantry, and, although Micaela refuses, she nevertheless joins in a charming march-like melody which the soldiers intone. Now the guard is about to be relieved, and we hear the military march in the distance. Behind the bandsmen march a crowd of boys, making big strides to keep step with the dragoons, and singing at the pitch of their voices. They are represented in the score by a *Coro di monelli*—a “chorus of ragamuffins.” Thus they sing:

When the soldiers mount on guard,  
We march with them, man for man;  
Trumpets! ring out our reward,  
Plan, rataplan, plan, rataplan.

This air, given first in the minor and then in the major, is an exquisite tone-picture, realising the scene depicted with wonderful vividness. The purist might indeed object to the hackneyed tune and the coarse staccato of the rhythm, but the shouts of schoolboys at the sight of a company of soldiers are not usually of a highly artistic order.

The new soldiers, Don José among them, now mount guard, and the boys vanish. We are just reaching the culminating point of the Act—the entrance of Carmen. The cigarette girls make their appearance at the sound of the factory-bell, and, holding lighted cigarettes, immediately burst into a gay chorus of piquant rhythm (“See, white cloudlets rising”) in praise of the fragrant weed in their

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## THE MUSIC

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fingers. The coquettish phrase of the sopranos, with its caressing undulations, will be specially noted. But here is Carmen herself, her coming duly announced by the "leading theme" before mentioned, her arrival greeted with acclamations by a remarkably tender phrase of the tenors. Musically, Carmen is characterised in her first phrase, as she sings a song to captivate the unfortunate José: "When shall I love you? I do not know." Bizet's biographer emphasises this detail. Here, he says, in effect, is the language of the daughter of Bohemia, full of indifference; who lets go her heart, or rather her senses, at the will of her fancy and her caprice. "Perhaps never, perhaps to-morrow," she replies to herself, and the phrase takes a caressing inflection—something like a vague promise, the semblance of a desire which allows of hope. Suddenly the *woman* reappears: "But not to-day, that is certain." With that quick change of feeling which peculiarly characterises her, Carmen passes from one sentiment to another, abruptly, without transition, from exciting and sensual love to blind hate which nothing can account for or justify. And with what art does the music portray it all!

This song is the famous "Habanera," which plays so important a part in the opera. It was written during the rehearsals to meet the wishes of Mme. Galli-Marié, who did not care for what Bizet had written originally. She wanted "a characteristic air,

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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something like a folk-song, slightly exciting, in which she could display the whole arsenal of her artistic perverseness; caresses of voice and smile, voluptuous modulations, bewitching glances, disturbing gestures." So Bizet seized on the theme of a real Spanish folk-song which had attracted his attention, making it his own by that characteristic accompaniment which is a triumph of harmonic and rhythmical devices. The song is one of the haunting numbers of the opera: the embodiment of coquetry and abandonment; simple in construction, often heard, always welcome. It fairly captivates Don José. Note here that it is at this first meeting between Carmen and José, while they are conversing together, that the "death theme" is heard in its *entirety* in the orchestra. Carmen now goes off with the girls, who laughingly repeat the refrain of the Habanera. José is left alone. When he puts Carmen's flowers in his tunic, the "death theme" is heard again, followed by snatches of the Habanera.

Then Micaela appears with the message from José's mother, and for the first time the whole atmosphere, the whole character of the music is changed. It is as if Bizet, especially in the lovely duet which follows between José and Micaela, had conceived the idea that virtue and musical correctness were inseparable; for now he approaches the orthodox form of opera more closely than has hitherto been the case. The discourse of the lovers is inter-



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## THE MUSIC

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rupted by an effectively dramatic chorus, "Help us, pray!" announcing the quarrel in the cigarette factory, and the assault by Carmen, who presently enters airily humming a graceful tune when she is being asked to explain her conduct. Bizet, as his biographer rightly insists, has translated with great truth this strange scene, in which the untamable character of the gipsy appears for the first time in its savage nakedness. Left in the charge of José, Carmen, seated on a stool, her hands tied behind her back, begins that entrancing scene of allurements by singing another song. This time it is in the form of the Seguidilla, a Spanish dance of quick movement and in triple time. The charm works, and the Act ends abruptly with the flight of Carmen.

Of the remaining Acts not so much need be said. The second Act, being chiefly concerned with smugglers and other lawless persons, contains a large amount of what may be aptly described as gipsy music. The prevalence of the national or local over the more purely human element in the music was early described as an essential defect in the opera. But that defect—if it is a defect—must be charged, not against the composer, but against the librettists. Bizet had to interpret the text provided for him, and, in this second Act, how could he better realise the situation than by giving a gipsy cast to his music? The opening number of the Act is a "Canzona Boema" sung by Carmen, with two of her com-

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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panions joining in the refrain. Here also should be noted the significance of the march-tune in the prelude, which is alternately taken up by Escamillo, the toreador, and his admiring friends. The Toreador's Song, with its commanding breadth of melody, its highly coloured orchestration, and the march-like movement of its refrain, is too well known to require comment. Among the concerted music which follows there is a graceful theme, to the tones of which Carmen and her companions boast of their wiles and seductions in imposing upon innocent manhood. The duet between José and Carmen is a remarkably able piece of workmanship, bringing out with astonishing clearness the contrast between the wayward girl and her vacillating but impassioned lover. It is markedly different from the rest of the music associated with the pair—a smooth-flowing melody, with an almost sad finish. The Act closes with an elaborate finale based on the theme of the preceding duet, and working up to a brilliant climax, with a high C for the sopranos. "Away to the mountains, away!" they sing, and Don José goes off with Carmen and the rest to take up his abode with the smugglers.

The third Act opens with a brief chorus sung by the tenors and basses, followed by a sextet, in which the chorus subsequently join. A recitative follows between Carmen and José—he, thinking sadly and remorsefully of his mother away among the hills

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## THE MUSIC

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of Navarre; she, betokening her waning affection by bidding him haste away to his parent, for he is not suited to play the part of a smuggler. Then comes a terzetto—or rather a solo alternating with a duet—assigned to Carmen and her two companions, Frasquita and Mercedes respectively. The latter consult the cards to discover their fortunes, and express delight at the prospect of new lovers in a flowing air. When Carmen turns to the same oracle, she finds that a sudden and violent death is foretold her; and here again we must remark how the music brings out the contrast between the sombre tone of her reflections and the thoughtless merriment of the two girls. The smugglers, with Carmen and her two companions, are now about to depart. Before they set out, a pleasing trio is sung by the latter, the chorus and the smugglers subsequently joining in. Micaela enters in search of José, after some slowly moving strains from the orchestra. She sees José on guard on a rock near by. But Escamillo is approaching, and Micaela thinks it prudent to conceal herself. A duet follows between José and the toreador: calm and expressive at first; later (when Escamillo has avowed his love for Carmen), charged with fury and passion. Presently Micaela is discovered in her hiding-place, and in a beautiful air she urges Don José to go with her to attend his mother's dying bed. At last he consents, and, as he goes,

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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Escamillo is heard rolling out the refrain of the Toreador's Song.

In the fourth Act we hear once more the "boisterously festive" music which we heard in the prelude before the curtain rose. Escamillo again appears, and his song is not wanting. The crowd assembled in the circus are applauding vigorously. We hear them in the distance. Meanwhile tragic issues are rapidly developing in the front of the stage. José, in a scene of great pathos, implores Carmen not to withdraw her love from him, who has become an outcast and a criminal for her sake; and at last, maddened by jealousy and the gipsy's saucy indifference, he plunges a dagger into her heart. Here, as before, the characters of the pair are admirably indicated by the music. When at length the spectators emerge from the circus to find Carmen dead, killed by her lover, the surprise in store for them is realised with marvellous ingenuity by the sudden introduction of a D natural into the key of F sharp major, in which the chorus is written. Thus did Bizet mingle terror with joy. The final exclamation of Don José: "Carmen, my adored Carmen!" marks a noble dramatic climax. It is preceded by the Carmen "leading theme," twice repeated fortissimo, thus revealing the full meaning of the phrase.

Tschaikowsky thus wrote of this Act: "I cannot play the last scene without tears in my eyes: the



'I will dance for thy pleasure'

Act II. Sc. 4



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## THE MUSIC

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gross rejoicings of the crowd who look on at the bull-fight, and, side by side with this, the poignant tragedy and death of the principal character, possessed by an evil fate." Tschaikowsky's brother tells that he never saw the composer so excited as when he witnessed Bizet's opera for the first time.

Glancing at the work as a whole, one cannot fail to be struck by its dramatic force, by the variety of its melody, by its orchestral colouring, by the strength and skill of its characterisation. Pigot remarks on the infinite nuances of the same picturesque scale, making for one end—for "a striking whole of truth and life." But what impresses one most is the musical presentation of the characters. Each person lives, acts, moves; preserving his distinct physiognomy, his very clear and very decided personality, without any falling away; without the truth of the type being, for a single instant, sacrificed to the exigencies of the whole, of a musically appropriate phrase, or even a repeat. Hence the exuberance of life and of movement which no attentive listener ever misses as one of the great features of the opera.

Three persons stand out with surprising vigour: (1) Carmen, the woman without heart or conscience; (2) José, the unfortunate José, devoid of strength and force of character, incapable of striving against the fatal passion which carries him blindly to his ruin; (3) Escamillo, the handsome, the victorious

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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bull-fighter, accustomed to tender glances, whom nothing can resist, woman nor bull. By the side of these three types, so clearly and vigorously drawn, the gentle, winning figure of Micaela "throws a sweet, pathetic radiance, a tender feeling which hovers over the entire work." She appears only at the beginning of the opera—at the moment when the gipsy has first thrown her spell on the weak heart of the brigadier; and then, in the third Act, in the mountains, to try and snatch her fiancé, now become a bandit, from the iron claws of Carmen, who tears and lacerates his soul, and to lead him to the bedside of his dying mother.

Such, then, is "Carmen"—a work containing a world of beauties; marked by brilliant orchestration, by a unique use of Spanish rhythms, by finished musicianship displayed on every page of the score. The plot gave the composer strong situations, effective contrasts, excellent chances for local colouring, and he took full advantage of his opportunities. "I consider 'Carmen' a *chef-d'œuvre* in the fullest sense of the word," wrote Tschaiikowsky—"one of those rare compositions which seems to reflect most strongly in itself the musical tendencies of a whole generation. . . . I am convinced that ten years hence [he was writing in 1880] it will be the most popular opera in the world." The prophecy has come quite nearly, if not actually true.



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## THE HISTORY

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### THE HISTORY

The first production of "Carmen" took place at the Opéra Comique, Paris, on the 3rd of March 1875. There was a crowded attendance on the occasion, including "all of Paris that assumes to have any voice in the creation of public opinion." But nobody seems to have thought much of the opera then—this opera which has now become the property of every amateur throughout the civilised world, and which, though often presented, never wears out its welcome. It is not very difficult to understand why. French audiences are essentially conservative, and "Carmen" came upon them like a shock. "Its passionate force," says one authority, "was miscalled brutality, and the suspicion of German influence which Bizet's clever use of guiding themes excited, was in itself enough to alienate the sympathies of the average Frenchman in the early seventies." Bizet, in short, had broken loose from the classical French style. His music displayed some startling, novel features, and for these the polite tastes of the French public were not prepared.

As the opera went on—we are speaking of the first performance—the public remained puzzled and cold. A few sympathisers "ventured to applaud here and there. The quintet and the Toreador's

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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Song made a favourable impression, and the prelude of the second Act was encored. Beyond this, approval did not go, the curtain falling upon what could be called, at best, a success of esteem." When some twelve or fifteen representations had been given, the work revived somewhat, but the stupidly unjust verdict of the premier performance (mostly confirmed by the Press, too) could not be lived down. The receipts rose, but less because the public liked the music than because they went to see what had been described as an immoral piece! Thus "Carmen" painfully reached its thirty-seventh representation. Musical history records plenty of similar examples, but none so sad; for Bizet died three months after his "Carmen" had been thus coldly received, and just before it began its triumphal progress.

To comprehend such an attitude, so obviously unjust, one must assume a momentary eclipse of taste—strange, inexplicable, but real phenomenon. We recall the fate, at Vienna, in 1788, of "Don Giovanni," one of the greatest masterpieces of human genius. How could we explain *that* fate except by the phenomenon just alluded to? Mozart, sad, discouraged, said mournfully: "I have written 'Don Giovanni' for myself and two or three friends." Pigot becomes sarcastic over the matter as regards Bizet. "It is," he says, "in France that, above all, we have the questionable privilege of these transient

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## THE HISTORY

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errors. We turn our backs on sincere and spontaneous admiration. How many sad recollections of this I could mention, but am content to evoke the great shade of Berlioz. For Berlioz, as for Bizet, the hour of justice comes slowly. Neither has attained a definite triumph. Bizet is dead, and carried to the tomb the cruel uncertainty of doubt. He did not enjoy, like his predecessor, the consolation of applause heard from beyond the frontiers; he perished before 'Carmen' began the triumphal progress which, at last, made us open our eyes." Of course we must remember that this was written before "Carmen" gained its present phenomenal vogue with the great opera-going public.

It was really with the first performance (in Italian) of the opera in England that the now enormous popularity of "Carmen" may be said to have begun. This performance took place on the 22nd of June 1878, with Miss Minnie Hauck, the young American *prima donna*, as the exponent of the title-rôle. There is a very interesting account of the performance in Mr. Herman Klein's "Thirty Years of Musical Life in London." Mr. Klein was a prominent musical critic, and he went to hear "Carmen" in the company of Signor Garcia, the grand old man of music, who died in 1906 after celebrating the 101st anniversary of his birth. It was not an easy thing at that time to persuade Garcia to go to the Opera. But an opera on a

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## F A V O U R I T E O P E R A S

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Spanish subject was an attraction, especially if it touched on bull-fighting, which appears to stir the blood of every Spaniard, young or old. On the way to the theatre Mr. Klein reminded his companion that "Carmen" had been next door to a failure at the Opéra Comique three years before. "I know," replied Garcia, "and the poor composer died of a broken heart three months later. That is the way France generally treats rising talent, including her own. I place little value on the opinion of Paris regarding new works."

The only bit of "Carmen" then known in London was the "Habanera," which had been sung for a year or so with notable success by Mme. Trebelli. The "Habanera," as a matter of fact, is a popular Spanish melody introduced by Bizet into his score, and he was aggravated when it was singled out for special praise. The Toreador Song, which eventually helped so much to render "Carmen" popular in every country, had not yet been heard in England. Bizet was practically an unknown composer; while the fact of his being a Frenchman was, in the opinion of Garcia (a Spaniard) distinctly against him as an indication of ability to write or imitate Spanish music. This is a curious point. Mr. Klein reminds us that the general feeling on the subject in Spain amounts almost to a national prejudice. To this day "Carmen," although greatly liked and frequently performed, is less intensely popular in Spain than

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## THE HISTORY

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in other countries. At the same time, we may perhaps allow that it takes a born Spaniard to recognise the extremely delicate nuances that distinguish the real native article from the clever foreign imitation.

At this first London performance "Carmen" was both well cast and well staged. Mr. Mapleson, the lessee of Her Majesty's, had seen it at the Brussels Monnaie during the preceding winter, and it was on the strength of the success won there, alike by the work and by Miss Hauck's representation of the leading character, that he had determined to transfer both to the boards of Her Majesty's. The American artist's "Carmen" was already famous; and London was delighted with the finish, the vivacity, and the charm of the performance. It was realised that she had caught with marvellous instinct and truth the peculiarities of the Spanish type, the coquettish manners, and the defiant devilry of the wayward gipsy. The "Escamillo"—and an altogether ideal one—was that fine baritone, Del Puente; while Campanini sang and acted with superb dramatic power as Don José. What names these were! And then Sir Michael Costa was the conductor! It was a notable performance altogether: to be remembered with honour and grateful feelings, since from that moment, as before remarked, dates the real popularity of the opera in Europe.

"Carmen" was produced at the same theatre in

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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French in November 1886, with Mme. Galli-Marié, the original creator, in the leading character. The Carl Rosa Company produced it in English, also at Her Majesty's, in February 1878, when Mme. Marie Roze took the part of the heroine.

Carmen is a rôle that exercises a great fascination over artists. It offers so many opportunities and can be played (and sung too) in so many different ways. There are four elements in Carmen's character: she was a daughter of the people, she was a reckless flirt, she was full of passion, and she was superstitious. The differences between one Carmen and another resolve themselves into a question of the greater or lesser prominence given to one or other of these. One is a greater flirt and more heartless; the other is more sensual; the third more plebeian. Some Carmens love Don José and merely play with Escamillo; others love Escamillo and regard Don José as a bore. Mme. Roze's assumption emphasised the "brutal animalism" of the gipsy less than that of Minnie Hauck, but the latter's representation of the character has been followed upon more or less identical lines by many excellent artists, including Pauline Lucca, Emma Calvé, and Zelié de Lussan.



I yield me prisoner: I have killed her'

Act IV. Sc. 2





# WEBER'S "DER FREISCHÜTZ"

## THE COMPOSER

WEBER and Meyerbeer may be brought near each other in this book if only because they were fellow-students under that Abbé Vogler who forms the subject of Browning's fine poem. Meyerbeer became an inmate of the Abbé's house at Darmstadt, and it was then that Weber met his brother-composer, under whose stimulus he wrote several of his early works. Vogler was immensely proud of having had such distinguished pupils. He used to exclaim: "Oh, how sorry I should have been if I had died before I formed these two!" It is a minor point worth noting that Weber was warmly received by Meyerbeer's parents at their charming mansion in Berlin.

Granting the musical faculty, Carl Maria Von Weber, who was born in 1785, had every chance of becoming a writer for the stage. His father was a travelling actor, once a man of wealth and good social position, and young Weber's interests were behind the scenes during all his earlier years. Like Beethoven's father, Weber senior was dazzled by the success of the prodigy Mozart, and the glamour was

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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all the greater since his niece Constance had married Mozart. But poor little Weber was a feeble child from the first. He inherited consumption from his mother, and hip-joint disease lamed him all his life. He could not walk till he was four. His first regular musical appointment was as conductor of the Opera at Breslau. Then he accepted a semi-official musical position with the royal family of Wurtemberg. The king was half-crazy and so fat that a space had to be cut in the dining-table to allow him to get near enough to feed. One day Weber had a stormy interview with him, and in pique ushered the Court laundress into the royal presence. For this trick Weber was sent to prison.

Subsequently he became connected with a theatre at Prague where he was scene-painter, stage-manager, prompter, copyist, superintendent of costumes, and musical director. In 1816 he settled down as director of the German Opera at Dresden, and it was there that he wrote "Der Freischütz," the work that brought him fame. "Preciosa" was given shortly after with great *éclat*, though not received with the same enthusiasm. "Euryanthe" followed in 1823—his "Ennuyante," he jestingly called it. "Oberon," his last opera, is a sort of German "Midsummer Night's Dream." It is peculiarly interesting to us, since it was commissioned by Charles Kemble, and produced first at Covent Garden in 1826. Kemble offered £1000 for it, and gave Weber three months

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## “DER FREISCHÜTZ”

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to complete the score. “Three months!” exclaimed the composer, who wrote slowly; “that will only afford me time to read the piece and design the plan.” He took in reality eighteen months.

He came to London to conduct the opera himself. It proved a great triumph. Weber wrote to his wife that the Overture was encored, and every air interrupted twice or thrice with bursts of applause. Alas! it was his swan-song. He was already in the final stages of consumption, with a cough which pained everybody to hear. He was to start for home in two days, but died in his sleep. This was in June 1826. They buried him in London; but two years later, mainly on the initiative of Wagner, his remains were removed to Dresden. This fact is worth remarking; for Weber, practically the founder of the modern school of operatic composers, was the true forerunner of Wagner, though he is not always so recognised. “Meyerbeer’s ‘Robert le Diable,’” says Sir Julius Benedict, “would not have been written but for ‘Der Freischütz,’ and Richard Wagner’s ‘Tannhäuser’ and ‘Lohengrin’ can be traced to ‘Euryanthe.’”

## “DER FREISCHÜTZ”

The libretto, prepared by the composer’s friend, the poet Kind, is based on a popular tradition,

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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familiar to German huntsmen, that whoever would seek the aid of the Demon-hunter may have in exchange for his soul seven magic bullets certain to hit the desired mark. If, within a given time, the huntsman so favoured fails to allure another within the Demon's power, his life becomes forfeit. If, on the other hand, he procures a fresh victim his life is extended, while the newcomer is furnished with a supply of the magic shot. And so on.

In the opera some Bohemian hunters assemble to fire at a mark. The rewards of the victor, according to ancient custom, are the situation of chief forester and the hand of a beautiful village girl. Agatha is the favoured damsel, and Max her lover. At the first attempt Max misses the mark and is in despair. A rival, Caspar, has possessed himself of the magic balls, but the time-limit of their virtue has expired; and instead of hitting Max, the innocent lover, as the Demon had promised, the shot rebounds and pierces the heart of Caspar. Justice triumphs, and Max and Agatha celebrate their nuptials.

The music of "Der Freischütz" is an admirable blending of Weber's brilliancy with the beautiful simplicity of the German folk-song. Indeed, its inspiration is drawn so directly from the Volkslied, that many critics denounced Weber as a plagiarist! Time has shown the stupidity of such charges. "Der Freischütz" is "German to the core, and

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## “DER FREISCHÜTZ”

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every page bears the impress of German inspiration, but the glamour of Weber's genius transmuted the rough material he employed into a fabric of the richest art." It is needless to speak in detail of this masterpiece—of the romantic passage for the horns at the opening of the Overture, which strikes the keynote of the opera; of the beautiful "Waldmusik"; of the poetic opening of the second Act, that fascinating duet between Agatha and Aennchen; of the brilliant and lively polacca that follows; of the inimitable "Softly Sighs" by which it is succeeded; of the dramatic trio; of the sombre grandeur of the incantation scene; of Agatha's tender prayer; of the brisk hunting choruses; of the sensational climax. "Der Freischütz" is certainly the most perfect German opera that exists. It is not, of course, superior to "Don Giovanni." But that is less a German than a universal opera; whereas this, the most important of all Weber's works, is essentially of Germany, by its subject, by the personages introduced, and by the general character of the music.

Weber had been occupied on it for years, and the 18th of June 1821 had been fixed for the first performance, at the Royal Theatre, Berlin. The doors were to be opened at six, but as early as four a vast crowd was besieging the entrances. The University students mustered in great force; and among the celebrities were Heine and young

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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Mendelssohn, who "shouted aloud and applauded with enthusiasm." Punctually at seven, the composer limped to the conductor's seat. Sir Julius Benedict, pupil and friend of Weber, who was present on the occasion, says:

Weber, though conducting with a very small *bâton*, and seemingly only indicating the change of time or the lights and shades of his noble composition, had nevertheless the most perfect control over the band. The effect of his scoring, the contrast between the calm of the introduction and the gloom and awe of the unearthly element which interrupt it, the fire of the allegro, the charm of that heavenly melody, which once heard can never be forgotten, the irresistible climax at the end, found worthy interpreters in the Berlin orchestra; and to the breathless silence which prevailed during the performance a storm of applause, such as I never heard before, nor shall hear again, followed. In vain were the repeated bows of the hero of the evening and his endeavours to go on with the next piece. At last, though reluctantly, he yielded, and a second performance of the whole overture, if possible, even better than the first, enhanced the impression.

From the close of the repeated Overture to the end of the opera the attention of the great audience was riveted, and when the curtain fell the applause was overwhelming. No one would leave till the composer had appeared on the stage to receive congratulations, which he did in every form, including bouquets, crowns, and laudatory verses. Weber's entry in his diary that evening is interesting:

First representation of "Der Freischütz" received with incredible enthusiasm. The overture and the popular songs

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## “DER FREISCHÜTZ”

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redemanded ; out of seventeen pieces fourteen applauded beyond measure. Everything for the best ; I was recalled, and went forward to salute the public, accompanied by Frau Seidler and Fraülein Eunike, not being able to find the others. Verses and crowns fell at my feet. *Soli Deo Gloria !*

No great opera, in fact, ever obtained a more complete and immediate triumph. To be sure, some of the critics croaked (as they always do), and even Spohr failed to see the reason for all the *furore*. The romantic poet Tieck thought it the most unmusical din he had ever heard on the stage. But the people liked it, and it was given fifty times in eighteen months. In a few years it had captured all the capitals of Europe. In London it became so popular that a gentleman advertising for a servant expressly stipulated that applicants should not be able to whistle its airs !

# MEYERBEER'S "HUGUENOTS" AND "ROBERT LE DIABLE"

## THE COMPOSER

JAKOB MEYERBEER, like Mendelssohn, the son of a Jewish banker, was born in Berlin in 1791. The family name was Beer, but a friend called Meyer left the composer a fortune on condition that he adopted his name; so the vulgar "Beer" was converted into the more euphonious Meyerbeer. Mendelssohn's master, Zelter, the friend of Goethe, gave him some lessons, and later, as already indicated, he was taken in hand by the Abbé Vogler. It was as a pianist that he gained his first distinctions; but he took to opera and achieved one or two triumphs in Italy in direct rivalry with Rossini. Weber was disgusted with his friend's concession to the prevailing taste. "It makes my heart bleed," he said, "to see a German composer of creative power stoop to become a mere imitator in order to curry favour with the crowd." Meyerbeer declared that he could not help himself. Living in Italy, he was "involuntarily drawn into the delicious maze of tones and bewitched in a magic garden from which I could not escape."



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## THE COMPOSER

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By-and-by he found no difficulty in escaping and creating a magic garden for himself.

In 1827 he married his cousin Mina Mosson. Then he settled in Paris, where he formed friendly relations with Cherubini, Auber, Halévy, Boieldieu, and others. He was fabulously rich (for a composer), but he lived like a miser, and worked as hard as if he depended entirely on his compositions. His mother used to say apologetically that he was "not obliged to compose." He wrote himself: "I am above all an artist, and it gives me satisfaction to think that I might have supported myself with my music from the time I was seven. I have no desire to stand aloof from my associates and play the rich amateur." Meyerbeer made large sums by his operas, and was certainly the wealthiest of all German composers. Schumann hit out at him because he wrote, not for art, but to please the great unthinking public. But the public are worth pleasing after all, and Meyerbeer had his reward. "The Huguenots" and "Robert le Diable" had both a long run of popularity. "Le Prophète" enjoyed less favour; but the two efforts in opera comique, "L'Etoile du Nord" and "Dinorah," were great favourites with a former generation. "Dinorah" would probably have held its place if the libretto (a vaguely-presented Breton legend of buried treasure) had not been so foolish. Meyerbeer's music would redeem many a poorer drama from

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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insignificance, but the text must always rob much of it of its proper effect.

Wagner sneered at Meyerbeer as "a Jew banker to whom it occurred to compose music," but he had enthusiastic praise for the long duet in the fourth Act of "The Huguenots." Wagner's treatment of Meyerbeer is, in fact, an episode one would rather not remember. When Wagner was in poverty in Paris, Meyerbeer exerted himself to obtain remunerative employment for him, and to make him known to influential people. Subsequently, when Wagner had "The Flying Dutchman" rejected by Leipzig and Munich, he sent it to Meyerbeer, who got it accepted at Berlin. At Berlin, too, Meyerbeer produced "Rienzi," after long and careful preparation. For all this Wagner rewarded him with the most inhuman ingratitude—an ingratitude which can only be explained by his rabid and ridiculous hatred of the Jews.

Meyerbeer died in Paris in 1863. He had a morbid dread of being buried alive. After his death a paper was found giving directions that small bells should be fixed to his hands and feet, and that his body should be carefully watched for four days, after which it was to be sent to Berlin for interment.

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## “THE HUGUENOTS”

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### “THE HUGUENOTS”

This opera was first produced at the Académie, Paris, on February 29, 1836. The libretto, by Scribe and Deschamp, deals with the variances between the Huguenots and Catholics, with a love-story interwoven.

The year is 1752. Raoul de Nangis is the leader of the Huguenots, while Count de St. Bris heads the Catholics. Marguerite de Valois desires to reconcile these factions, and to that end devises a scheme to bring about a marriage between Raoul and Valentine, the daughter of St. Bris. This she would have accomplished but for the fact that Raoul remembers seeing his betrothed in the house of the Count de Nevers under circumstances which would wound his sense of honour did he further thrust his attentions on Valentine. Therefore he determines to have no more to do with the matter.

But Raoul's hatred of St. Bris is aggravated, and, seeing Valentine led to her marriage ceremony by Nevers, he challenges St. Bris to combat. St. Bris, in his turn, plans the murder of Raoul, which is prevented by Valentine, who all the time has never wavered in her love for Raoul, but has been forced into this marriage. When Raoul learns this, his grief knows no bounds. He visits Valentine to bid

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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her a final adieu, but is interrupted by St. Bris, Nevers, and their followers. Valentine succeeds in secreting Raoul, and from his place of hiding he overhears the notorious plot of Catherine de Medicis for the massacre of the Huguenots on the Eve of St. Bartholomew. Raoul is afterwards entreated by Valentine not to risk his life on the occasion. But honour prevails, and he departs to warn his comrades and prepare for the impending danger.

Berlioz called "The Huguenots" a musical encyclopædia with material enough for twenty ordinary operas. It has been likened to a cathedral; it has been called "an evangel of religion and love." It has been said to be "the most vivid chapter of French history ever penned." Wagner declaimed against its blatant theatricalism. Schumann declared that the music was fit only for a circus!

Quite recently the opera has had a distinguished defender in M. Saint-Saëns, the composer of "Samson and Delilah." It had been revived at the new Théâtre Lyrique in Paris in 1909, and certain superior critics had their fling at it. Whereupon its cause was warmly championed by M. Arthur Pougin, one of the leaders of musical criticism in Paris. It was to signify his cordial approval of M. Pougin's championing of Meyerbeer that M. Saint-Saëns wrote. In his letter, addressed to M. Pougin, he says: "You have very properly praised the three last Acts, full of nobility in style, powerfully and

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## “THE HUGUENOTS”

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pathetically inspired. It is certain that with the opening of the third Act the work suggests the rising flight of a bird. But is this bird so contemptible as you seem to think whilst it is still strutting on the ground, pluming itself and flapping its wings?” In this last sentence the reference is to Marcel’s Huguenot war-song and to Queen Marguerite’s aria.

Saint-Saëns goes on to show that these are masterpieces of their kind. Such songs are no longer fashionable in opera; but, to pass sober judgment on a work of art, it must be examined in the light of the epoch in which it was created, and not solely in that of our own day. Of the scene in which Marguerite first appears, Meyerbeer made a “Court of Love.” From the first notes of the introduction—initiated by the violoncellos, taken up by the flute—we are enveloped in an atmosphere of feminine charm; and when the delightful phrase, “O beau pays de la Touraine,” unfolds itself, accompanied by the harps, one is transported into a world of amorous elegance unknown elsewhere.

After all this, one feels courageous enough to venture the statement that a Meyerbeer redivivus would easily adapt himself to the circumstances and conventions of to-day, and quickly eclipse his modern professional detractors. Meyerbeer’s genius for opera is clearly evident not only in “The Huguenots,” but in “Le Prophète,” “L’Africaine,” and “Dinorah”; which are its inferiors only because

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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they illustrate subjects much less fascinating intrinsically, neither steeped in the glamour of Marguerite de Valois' brilliant Court, nor revolving round so impressive an historical event as the massacre of St. Bartholomew.

### “ROBERT LE DIABLE”

The libretto of this opera was written by Eugène Scribe. Scribe was one of the most fertile playwrights and the most skilful librettist of modern times. But “Robert le Diable” is not a supremely good example of his art. It embodies, indeed, a strange mixture of absurdities and contradictions, and can only be praised from a scenic point of view.

The scene is laid in Sicily, where Robert, Duke of Normandy, arrives to compete in a magnificent tournament for the hand of the Princess Isabella. Robert's wild escapades earn for him the sobriquet of “Le Diable”; and he crowns his folly by gambling away at a single sitting all his possessions, even to the horse and arms which were to serve him in the tournament. Robert's foster-sister, the gentle Alice, tries to check his wayward course, but Robert is constantly beset by the temptations of his demon-father Bertram. Isabella supplies him with a fresh horse, but by Bertram's trickery he is beguiled away from Palermo, and fails to appear at the tournament.

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## “ R O B E R T L E D I A B L E ”

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Bertram then persuades him that to win Isabella he must go to his mother's tomb in the convent ruins and pluck a magic branch of cypress which will defeat all rivals.

Robert does this amidst infernal orgies of the spirits of profligate nuns, and is enabled by supernatural means to enter Isabella's room with the view of carrying her off. However, he yields to her entreaties and breaks the talismanic branch, thus destroying his uncanny power. Bertram, whose term of evil influence on earth expires at midnight, again tries to tempt Robert. But Alice, knowing of the time-limit, brings Robert the last warning words of his dead mother, and gets him to delay his decision till midnight. Midnight strikes; Bertram vanishes with the thunder to the place appointed of old for Don Giovanni, Caspar, and other heroes of his class, and the scene changes to the Cathedral, where Robert and Isabella are now happily mated.

In “Robert le Diable,” as in Meyerbeer's other operas, there is a wealth of melody and harmony and invention which would surprise many if they would only look over its pages carefully. Mendel says of this opera particularly: “To the flowing melody of the Italians and the solid harmony of the Germans, Meyerbeer united the pathetic declamation and the varied piquant rhythm of the French.” Mendelssohn called it a cold, calculated work of the imagination, without heart or effect; and so thought many of the

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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Germans. But the music is at several points (for instance, at the rising of the ghostly nuns) really dramatic, and nowhere else is Meyerbeer's splendid use of the orchestra better illustrated.

"Robert le Diable" was written when Meyerbeer was forty, and it was produced for the first time in Paris in November 1831. The performance was marred by a series of nasty accidents which might have had grave consequences. In the third Act a screen fell with a crash, just missing the head of the impersonator of Alice; and after the chorus of demons, the "curtain of clouds" had reached a great height when the wires snapped and it descended perilously near Mdlle. Taglioni (representing the Abbess), who was lying on her tomb in the character of a statue not yet animated. In the fifth Act, Nourrit, the representative of Robert, fell into the "vampire trap" which had conveyed Bertram below the stage, and everybody thought he was killed. However, these things were all sunk in the interest of the opera itself, the success of which proved both brilliant and lasting. It made the fortune of the Paris Opera. In 1858 it had brought in upwards of four million francs. It was given 333 times in twenty years. In 1883 it was given in Vienna for the 401st time in fifty years.



## NICOLAI'S "MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR"

**THIS** opera has recently been revived, and well deserves to be. It is a bright little work, charming and fresh, in spite of its old style; full of captivating melody, with some excellent concerted writing, and thoroughly good orchestration. The gay overture is widely known from frequent hearings in the concert room.

The story is, of course, an adaptation of Shakespeare's comedy. Mosenthal, the librettist, has faithfully followed the original play in all essentials. The only modification of the plot is in the last scene, where Dr. Caius and Slender, instead of being each wedded to a "great lubberly boy," wed each other, to their increased mutual discomfiture.

Otto Nicolai, the composer, had an interesting career. He was born at Königsberg in 1810, and died in 1849—dates which coincide with those of the birth and death of Chopin, and almost with those of Mendelssohn. His father ill-treated him, and he ran away when he was sixteen. He passed through much trial and suffering before he arrived at Berlin in 1827. But a kind helper arranged for his pro-

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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fessional training; and when, by-and-by, he went to Rome, he zealously devoted himself to operatic composition, tempted by the facile successes of the Italians, who considered him a fellow-countryman in consequence of the *i* in his name.

In 1841 he was called to Vienna as Court Kapellmeister, and subsequently founded the now celebrated Philharmonic Society there. In 1844, five years before his death, he had chosen "The Merry Wives" for the subject of an opera, but it was not until March 9, 1849, at Berlin, that the work was first produced. The success was immense; but already the composer was seriously ill, and though he managed to conduct the first four performances, like Bizet with "Carmen," he lived only a few weeks to enjoy his triumph. None of his other operas have survived.

# BALFE'S "BOHEMIAN GIRL"

## THE COMPOSER

MICHAEL WILLIAM BALFE was born in Dublin in May 1808. His family had been professionally associated with music and the stage for many years. His grandfather played in the band of a Dublin theatre, and it is said that his great-grandfather was a pupil of the famous violinist, Dubourg, who played at the first performance of "The Messiah" in 1742. Balfe's father was a good violinist himself, and it was from him that the future composer received his first lessons. Later on, being entrusted to a more advanced master, he made such progress that he was able to appear in public—in the double character of violinist and composer, too!—before he was seven years old. Two years later, Madame Vestris was singing his ballads before enthusiastic audiences in the comedy of "Paul Pry"—ballads which are not quite forgotten even now.

Young Balfe went on studying the violin with a view to a professional career until his father died in 1823. Then he determined to try his fortune in London. Charles Edward Horn, the singer (the

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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same who wrote the air of "Cherry Ripe"), happened to be fulfilling an engagement in Dublin. Balfe went to him, and asked to be taken to London as an articulated pupil. Horn foresaw a musical future for the young aspirant, and articles were signed for a period of seven years. Balfe had not been many weeks in the metropolis when an unsuccessful *début* at the Oratorio concerts proved to him the need of further study, and study was diligently pursued for the next few years.

Meanwhile, he had to live, and to that end he accepted engagements as a violinist at Drury Lane Theatre and elsewhere. He conceived an idea that he might make something out of his voice; and the first result of that idea was an unappreciated appearance on the operatic stage—at Norwich, as Caspar in "Der Freischütz." Soon after this he had a romantic sort of experience. In London he met a certain Count Mazzara, who, seeing in him the very image of a son he had just lost, offered to take Balfe with him to Italy and bear the costs of his further training. Balfe lived in Rome with the Count for some time, pursuing his studies in a somewhat desultory fashion.

At Milan, later, he studied especially singing and composition, and wrote music for a ballet which had a remarkable success. Next we find him in Paris, where the stern old Cherubini introduced him to Rossini. Rossini was so delighted with his singing



The Rescue of Arline



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## THE COMPOSER

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of an air from "The Barber" that he promised to engage Balfe for the Italian Opera if he would only study under Bordogni for a year before his *début*. Money was found for this purpose by a friend of Cherubini, and when the time came, Balfe made such a satisfactory appearance at the Théâtre des Italiens that he was engaged for three years at a salary of 15,000 francs for the first year, 20,000 francs for the second, and 25,000 francs for the third. His health did not hold out to enable him to complete the time, and he returned to Italy, where he sang at Palermo and elsewhere. It was now that he met his future wife, Mdlle. Lina Rosa, a Hungarian singer of great talent and beauty, whom he shortly afterwards married.

A meeting with Malibran resulted in an operatic and concert tour with that great artist. Then he returned to England, where his first notable opera, "The Siege of Rochelle," was produced with immense success at Drury Lane in October 1835. Next year came "The Maid of Artois," written for Malibran, for which he received £100. Opera succeeded opera with wonderful celerity. Balfe was a most prolific composer, having between 1829 and 1870 written no fewer than twenty-nine operas. Indeed, with few exceptions, English opera was represented for more than a quarter of a century solely by Balfe. He wrote with great quickness and spontaneity; in fact it has been charged against

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## F A V O U R I T E O P E R A S

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him that he was "too ready." But he cared very little for the dicta of the pedants and the big-wigs. He "wrote what came at the moment to his mind; he drew his inspiration at an ever-welling fount of melody, a spring that was perennially fresh and sparkling." There is a good illustration of this. The story goes that a young musician applied to Balfe for lessons in harmony and composition. On being told that he had already gone through Albrechtsberger's and Cherubini's works on counterpoint and fugue, Balfe very candidly said to the intended pupil: "Then you had better go to some one else, for I'm blest if you don't understand much more already of such matters than I could teach you in a century."

One would have thought that the labour entailed in the composition of such a host of operatic works would exclude the possibility of other engagements. But night after night found Balfe on the boards at Drury Lane; now playing *Theodore* in "Joan of Arc," and again sustaining the principal rôle in "Farinelle," or taking part in "Scaramuzza" at the Lyceum. There can be no question that Balfe's knowledge of vocalisation and his powers as a singer helped him greatly to write in that tuneful, mellifluous style which marks him as one of the sweetest melodists of his time.

Grown thus familiar with the stage, we cannot wonder that Balfe should have been tempted, like Handel, to undertake the responsibilities of manage-



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## THE LIBRETTO

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ment. He leased the Lyceum in 1840, and came before the public with "Keolanthé," Madame Balfe playing the principal part. Fortune, alas! forsook him, and the enterprise was abandoned. It was under this disappointment that he removed to Paris, whither his fame had preceded him. In 1843 he was back in England, with "The Bohemian Girl." He went to Paris again in 1845; but next year, on the secession of Sir Michael Costa, he was appointed conductor of the Italian Opera at Her Majesty's Theatre; a post which he was well able to fill by his long acquaintance with operatic details, and his personal skill as a player and singer. At the end of 1852 he was released from all his musical engagements, and the next few years were spent in various musical tours in England and abroad. Balfe's active career was practically over by this time. In 1864 he gave up his London house and removed to Rowney Abbey, a small estate in Hertfordshire, which he had bought. It was there that he died in the autumn of 1870. His remains rest in Kensal Green Cemetery, and there is a tablet to his memory in Westminster Abbey.

## THE LIBRETTO

The libretto of "The Bohemian Girl" ("immortal balderdash," it has been called) came from the pen

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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of Alfred Bunn, the manager of Drury Lane Theatre, whom Malibran facetiously dubbed "Good Friday" because he was "a hot, cross Bunn." Bunn had already collaborated with Balfe in "The Maid of Artois." He derived his idea of the libretto of "The Bohemian Girl" from a ballet in three Acts called "The Gipsy," written by Saint Georges, and produced at the Grand Opera, Paris, in 1839. Saint Georges had taken *his* story from the "Novelas Exemplares" of Cervantes, the author of "Don Quixote" (the same work which had furnished Weber with his "Preciosa"). But Bunn did not know this until some of the friendly pressmen told him of it after the first performance.

There was a question about what the opera should be called. Bunn himself thought of "The Gipsy"; but that, it was found, had been the title of a discredited transpontine drama, and so was given up. Then he thought of "Thaddeus of Warsaw"; but as he had taken the name of his Polish hero from Miss Porter's then popular novel, the idea of the opera being mistaken for an adaptation of the novel led him to abandon that too. "La Bohémienne" was next proposed. But why give an English opera a French name? objected certain advisers. Bunn, taking the hint, decided for "The Bohemian," but immediately remembered that this would as readily indicate a creature of the male sex as his girlish Arline. Finally, "The Bohemian Girl" was decided upon.



The heart bowed down



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## THE LIBRETTO

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ACT 1.—The scene of the opera is laid in Austria. When the curtain rises we see the Castle and grounds of Count Arnheim, the Governor of Presburg, who is entertaining a hunting-party. Presently the Count himself enters, accompanied by his six-year-old daughter Arline, and his nephew Florestein. Afterwards a Polish exile and fugitive, Thaddeus, rushes in, seeking refuge from the Austrian military. "'Tis sad to leave your Fatherland," he sings. Next there enters a band of passing gipsies, with one Devilshoof for leader, singing a blithe Gipsy Chorus. Thaddeus tells his story to Devilshoof, and the latter induces the proscribed rebel to cast in his lot with the wanderers

Meanwhile, Florestein and certain of the sportsmen dash excitedly across the Castle grounds, looking for Arline, who has been attacked by a stag. Thaddeus, seizing a rifle, hurries away after them, finds Arline, and frees her from danger by slaying the stag. The Count, overcome with gratitude for the safe return of his child, invites her deliverer and his companion, Devilshoof, to an approaching banquet at the Castle. The invitation is accepted, and at the banquet the company are startled by Thaddeus defiantly refusing to drink the Emperor's health. He is about to be dealt with by the soldiers when Devilshoof intervenes on his behalf. Then the Gipsy Chief, for his daring, is himself arrested and confined to the chateau, while Thaddeus, at Arnheim's earnest

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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entreaty, is allowed to go free. The banquet is resumed, but is soon interrupted again by the escape of Devilshoof, who is seen by the terrified company bearing away in his arms the little Arline. With a stirring finale, the Act closes.

ACT 2.—Twelve years have now gone by, and Count Arnheim is still without tidings of the kidnapped Arline. Indeed, he has given up all hope of ever seeing her again. The Act opens in the gipsy camp in the outskirts of Presburg, where a great fair is about to be held. There, in the Queen's tent, Arline is peacefully asleep, Thaddeus watching over her. A short chorus is sung, and the gipsies, with Devilshoof at their head, scamper away in search of booty. By-and-by they come upon Florestein, returning from a debauch, half-drunk. His jewelry is soon in the hands of the gipsies, including a certain diamond medallion which Devilshoof retains for himself. Meanwhile Arline, waking from her sleep, has been relating to Thaddeus a strange dream she has just had ("I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls"). Thaddeus thereupon reveals to her the meaning of the scar on her arm, and announces himself as her rescuer. She desires to know her history, but Thaddeus declines to reveal the secret lest it should blight her regard for him; for Thaddeus is in love with Arline. There are mutual confessions of attachment, and the Gipsy Queen (who is herself enamoured of Thaddeus) entering, she unites the pair

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## THE LIBRETTO

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according to the customs of the tribe, at the same time secretly vowing to be revenged against Arline.

Here we have a new scene—a street in the town, with the great fair in progress. The gipsies soon arrive, Arline marching at their head, blithely singing (“Come with the Gipsy Bride”), to the accompaniment of the castanets. Her companions disappear down the street, and she, with Thaddeus, Devilshoof, and the Queen, get mixed up among the throng of merrymakers. They encounter Florestein, who, attracted by Arline’s beauty, attempts to insult her. He is recognised by the Queen as the owner of the stolen medallion, which she now maliciously places on Arline’s neck, ostensibly as a reward for Arline’s courage in resenting Florestein’s overtures. Florestein thereupon has Arline arrested for the theft of his medallion, and she is borne away to the Castle, to be tried by her own father.

We are transported to the Court-room. Count Arnheim, entering, is once more saddened by the sight of his long-lost Arline’s portrait, and his grief goes into that melancholy reverie, “The heart bowed down.” Then Arline is brought in for her trial. As it proceeds, the Count’s attention is directed to the scar on her arm. He asks her how it came there. She tells the story as Thaddeus had recounted it. The mystery is revealed. Arnheim recognises his daughter, and the Act ends with that beautiful ensemble, “Praised be the will of Heaven.”

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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ACT 3.—This Act opens in the drawing-room of Castle Arnheim. Arline is back in her home, but still she loves Thaddeus. Mainly through the cunning of Devilshoof, who accompanies him, Thaddeus contrives to have a meeting with her. He proclaims his passion afresh—in the tender and immortal “When other lips and other hearts”—and she avows that she will be faithful to him. At this point steps are heard approaching, and Thaddeus and Devilshoof get themselves into hiding. A distinguished company march in, and the long-lost Arline is presented to them.

A woman, closely veiled, shortly appears on the scene, and, being questioned as to her identity, tells that she is the Gipsy Queen. She shows where Thaddeus is concealed, and he is dragged forth and ordered to remove himself at once from the company. Arline protests that she loves him, and will go with him. She pleads with her father to relent. Thaddeus proclaims his noble descent, and in that rousing martial song, “When the fair land of Poland,” vaunts his prowess in battle. Arnheim is by this induced to give his daughter to the noble exile. The Gipsy Queen, filled with wrath and despair, prompts one of her tribe to fire at Thaddeus as he is embracing Arline. Luckily, a timely movement on the part of Devilshoof saves him, and the Queen herself is killed instead.



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## THE MUSIC

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### THE MUSIC

Opinions differ widely as to the merits of Balfe's music. The position is well summed up by one of his biographers, Mr. Barclay Squire. To musicians who look at him from the point of view of the old ideal, his brilliancy, melody, and fertility of invention entitle him to a place beside Rossini and Auber; while, on the other hand, by those who look for deeper thought and more intellectual aims in music, he will be regarded as a mere melodist, an ephemeral caterer to a generation who judged rather by manner of expression than by the value of what is expressed. The truth lies midway between these extremes. Balfe's invention, knowledge of effect, above all his melody, will keep his works from being forgotten; and if they are deficient in those higher qualities demanded by present-day taste, that is no reason why, within their limits, they should cease to please.

"The Bohemian Girl" has been described as a string of melodic pearls, and such indeed it is. Balfe had an inexhaustible vein of tunefulness. Strauss, senior, most popular of German dance-music composers, dubbed him "King of Melody." These airs of his are pure and natural, written spontaneously, as it would seem, without the slightest effort. The musical pedant may sneer at them, but they have a

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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way of finding out the tender spots in the human heart.

“I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls,” in the second Act, is one of the world’s most popular favourites. And who that is at all susceptible to the charms of music does not know “When other lips”? In connection with that celebrated air, the following anecdote of Balfe is worth reproducing as characteristic of the impulsive nature of the man. Balfe wrote six or seven settings of the words before he hit on the final form of “When other lips.” He had tried, and tried, and tried again for the “right” melody. Late one night a cab drove up to a friend’s door, and a mighty peal of the bell startled the household. His friend, recognising Balfe’s voice outside, went down and opened the door. Balfe rushed in, waving a roll of music over his head, and calling out, “I’ve got it! I’ve got it! I’ve got it!” He ran upstairs to the drawing-room, sat down at the piano, and awoke the surprised echoes of the night with the now-renowned melody.

He can hardly have had such trouble with the other gems of “The Bohemian Girl.” The whole thing sounds so natural and easy—the fascinating melodies; the sparkling, animated choruses; the orchestration charming and restrained; no noise for the sake of noise, no exuberance of sound, no absolute vulgarity. Of course the modern musician may regard Balfe’s orchestration as comparatively



Arline avows her love for Thaddeus



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## THE HISTORY

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feeble, his dramatic grip of a rather elementary kind. But Balfe produces his effect and that is enough.

Much that Balfe wrote in the way of opera has gone quite out of fashion. But "The Bohemian Girl" has never lost its power to please, and it must be many a day before that happens.

### THE HISTORY

"The Bohemian Girl" was first produced at Drury Lane Theatre on November 27, 1843. Sir Julius Benedict was then the musical chief at Drury Lane, but Balfe himself conducted the first performance.

At this performance, the audience went almost wild with enthusiasm. "I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls" and "Then you'll remember me" were twice repeated. For a few nights after the initial representation, however, the opera did not draw. The audiences that came were indeed enthusiastic, but it was not until nearly a fortnight had passed that there was anything like adequate houses. In consequence of this Balfe had in the meantime gone to Paris, where he had other engagements on hand. But Drury Lane was filling up every night, and at last Bunn was in a position to send this message to the composer: "Come back to London. The

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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'Bohemian Girl' is a triumph. Houses crammed every night."

And so it went on till the hundredth night. Messrs. Chappell had given Balfe £500 for the right of printing and publishing the songs, and such was the demand for copies of these that they repaid themselves in a very short time. Bunn received £100 from the same firm for the use of the words. The melodies were snatched up and sung everywhere in an incredibly short time. They were warbled to countless pianos, whistled by errand-boys, ground out on barrel-organs till, as one put it, they "beat upon the ear night and day like the waves of the restless ocean." The success of the opera and its influence upon society were, in fact, unparalleled. Mr. W. A. Barrett, Balfe's latest biographer, says that everything was tinged with a gipsy complexion. Scores of songs relating to gipsy life were issued from the Press. Novelists wrote stories in which were revived the old worked-up incidents connected with the wandering tribe. Readers began to inquire for George Borrow's book on the "Gipsies of Spain," issued two years before, and his publishers were encouraged to produce a new book by him in consequence of the success of the first. In short, the town was gipsy mad, and all because of "The Bohemian Girl."

Nor did the popularity of the opera cease with its run in London. Staudigl, the eminent basso,

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## THE HISTORY

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produced it in a German version, and so popular did it become in the critical Fatherland that it was played at three different theatres in Vienna at the same time. It is one of the very few English operas that have ever achieved such distinction. In its Italian form it was produced at Drury Lane as "La Zingara" in February 1858, with Mdlle. Piccolomini as Arline, and Giuglini as Thaddeus. Giuglini's rendering of "When other lips" was so exquisite that he was invariably encored. On this particular evening one encore was not sufficient for the audience, and Piccolomini, whose part obliged her to remain on the stage listening to his love-song, grew weary of the reiterated call for a repetition and calmly fetched a chair and sat herself down with a resigned look on her face, much to Giuglini's disgust. The French version, called "La Bohémienne," for which Balfe added several numbers and extended his original to five Acts, was produced at the Théâtre Lyrique, Paris, in December 1869, and gained for Balfe the Cross of the Legion of Honour.

It may be added, in supplement of what has been said about the first production of "The Bohemian Girl" in 1843, that at the close of the hundredth performance Balfe was led on the stage and presented with a valuable tea-service. The inscription read: "To Mr. M. W. Balfe, the composer of eleven successful operas in London." Somebody sub-

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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sequently remarked to Gilbert à Becket that it seemed odd to present an Irishman with a tea-service, whereupon the inveterate punster replied that he supposed it was in allusion to the Bohea—mian Girl!





'I dreamt I dwelt in marble halls'



## WALLACE'S "MARITANA"

SOME little notice of "Maritana" may fittingly follow "The Bohemian Girl," for the composer, William Vincent Wallace, was, like Balfe, an Irishman: born at Waterford in 1814, the son of a military bandmaster. The two might also come together if only because a very exalted critic has written of "Maritana" and "The Bohemian Girl" as "those tiresome English operas which have enjoyed the favour of the lower class of operatic audiences for so very long." Wallace had a most adventurous career. After serving as a violinist in a Dublin theatre (he was a brilliant violinist and pianist too), he emigrated to Australia while still in his teens, and spent some time in the bush, chiefly as a sheep-farmer. During a casual visit to Sydney, his ability as a violinist attracted the notice of the Governor, General Sir Richard Bourke, and under Bourke's patronage he settled for a time in Sydney. But the demon of restlessness possessed him, and he set out on a cruise in a whaler. There was a murderous mutiny aboard, and Wallace narrowly escaped with his life. Undeterred by this experience, he ventured among the rebel Maoris of New Zealand, was captured, and was within an ace of being sacrificed. He visited

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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India, and gave concerts in South, Central, and North America. In 1841 he conducted the Italian Opera at Mexico. Twelve years later, he returned finally to Europe; lived partly in London, partly in Paris, and died in October 1865. In later years his sight became impaired, and he suffered much from rheumatic gout.

Wallace was a better musician than Balfe, but critics will not allow that "Maritana" is much superior to "The Bohemian Girl." It has never been so popular, certainly, and it is the fashion to sneer at it. When it was revived in London in 1902, a newspaper paragraphist wrote: "'Maritana,' one of the most popular operas for half a century in the suburbs, the provinces, and the Colonies, will be seen and heard amid the superior surroundings of Covent Garden this evening." But there is a vein of rich, spontaneous melody in the work which might well give it a more vigorous life than it now enjoys. Wallace, talking once to a friend about "rising composers," declared that there was "not the ghost of a tune in the whole lot." There is plenty of tune in "Mary Turner," as the old travesty title was. The air, "Scenes that are brightest," was once sung everywhere. The opera has always been especially popular with the Australians, who claim, as a traditional belief, that it was partially composed on their soil. The original production was at Drury Lane, in November 1845.

The story evolved in the libretto is founded on the

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## WALLACE'S "MARITANA"

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French drama of "Don Cæsar de Bazan." Maritana is a street-singer. She has attracted the notice of the King of Spain, and a courtier, Don José, determines to aid the King in his amour—this in order that José may afterwards expose the King's infidelity as a means of advancing his own favour with the Queen. Duelling is forbidden in Madrid, and a spendthrift nobleman, Don Cæsar de Bazan, has incurred the death-penalty for protecting a poor youth named Lazarillo from arrest. José promises De Bazan that he shall be shot instead of hanged if he will marry a veiled lady an hour before the execution. The intention is to give Maritana a position at Court as a nobleman's widow. Don Cæsar agrees to the arrangement; but Lazarillo removes the bullets from the soldiers' rifles, so that there is no execution and no widow. Don Cæsar makes his way to a suburban villa, and succeeds in putting an end to both the King's attentions to Maritana and Don José's attentions to the Queen. The latter performance secures him a free pardon, and his operatic history ends when he is made Governor of Valentia.

Wallace wrote other operas which used to be occasionally staged. "Lurline," founded on the Rhenish legend of the Loreley, used by Mendelssohn, has more genuine musical merit than "Maritana," but is spoiled by a confused libretto. "The Amber Witch" has also some clever and charming pieces. But Wallace survives by the one opera.

## BENEDICT'S "LILY OF KILLARNEY"

THE name of Sir Julius Benedict was for many years like a household word in musical England. Born at Stuttgart in 1804, Benedict, like Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer, was the son of a Jewish banker. He is said to have been a cousin of Heine. His studies were at first pursued under Hummel, the virtuoso pianist and composer, and he became the favourite pupil of Weber, of whom he wrote a short biography. With Rossini, Meyerbeer, Verdi, Mendelssohn, Bellini, and Donizetti, he was more or less intimate. He was probably the last survivor of those who ever saw and spoke to Beethoven. The "saucy little fellow," as the composer of "Fidelio" called him, was the innocent means of the reconciliation between Beethoven and Weber. This was in 1823. At Baden he and Weber once passed some delightful moments with Beethoven in a dingy room furnished with a dilapidated Broadwood.

When studying with Hummel at Weimar, he watched, with boyish reverence, Goethe walking with the Grand Duke. He was present at a private rehearsal at which Weber sang through the whole of his new "Der Freischütz," with poor enough voice,

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## "LILY OF KILLARNEY"

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but with infectious earnestness and fire. Benedict practised his profession first in Vienna, Naples, and Paris; but he settled in London in 1835, and from that time he "became thoroughly English, so that only very few knew that he was a born German." He was in turn conductor at the Lyceum; at Drury Lane, where "The Bohemian Girl" and "Maritana" were brought out under his baton; and at Her Majesty's Theatre. In 1850 he toured America with Jenny Lind, and shared in her triumphs in a series of 122 concerts. He was an excellent pianist, and his annual concert was looked upon for fifty years as one of the great festivals of the London musical season. His merits were fully acknowledged. He was knighted in 1871, and was decorated with many foreign orders. Late in life he married a pupil, Miss Forty ("a union of *piano* and *forte*," said a wag), and King Edward VII., as Prince of Wales, was sponsor to his son. His death took place in London, in June 1885.

Benedict's first English opera, "The Gipsy's Warning," was produced in 1838 with notable success. The fine song, "Rage, thou angry storm," used to be a high favourite with basses. Other operas enjoyed long runs, but only "The Lily of Killarney" has retained a place on the stage. It was produced at Covent Garden in 1862, soon after the success of Boucicault's play, "The Colleen Bawn," upon which the excellent libretto is founded.

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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It was subsequently staged at the principal theatres in Germany.

Briefly the story is as follows. Harry Cregan, an Irish landowner, has secretly married Eily O'Connor, a pretty peasant girl of Killarney. But the fortunes of Harry's house need repairing, and, seeing an opportunity for contracting a rich marriage, he thinks of repudiating Eily. Eily declines to give up her marriage certificate; whereupon Danny Mann, a friend of Harry, tries to drown her in the lake. She is saved by Myles na Copalleen, a smuggler and hunter, who shoots Danny. Eily's narrow escape from death brings Harry to his senses. He gives up the idea of his contemplated marriage with the wealthy Thekla, and publicly intimates that he is the husband of Eily.

There is much dramatic attractiveness about the music, with an abundance of delicious, tender melody, refined harmony, and effective instrumental scoring. Naturally, the work shows the influence of Weber, but the vein of "plaintive melancholy" which runs through it is entirely Benedict's own.



## THOMAS'S "ESMERALDA"

OF works by later English composers, only "Esmeralda" holds the stage. The composer, Arthur Goring Thomas, was born in Sussex in 1851. He only began to study music seriously after he was grown up, but he became a pupil of the Royal Academy of Music, and greatly distinguished himself there. He finished his artistic education in France, and of that fact his music shows many traces. His death in 1892 was tragic and melancholy. He had been suffering from mental depression. One Sunday evening, his medical attendant being with him, he suddenly threw himself in front of a train at West Hampstead Station and was killed. A Goring Thomas Scholarship was founded the same year, as a memorial, at the Royal Academy of Music.

"Esmeralda" was written to the commission of the late Carl Rosa, who in 1875 had founded the Company still bearing his name. It was produced in London in 1883. The libretto is based on Victor Hugo's "Notre Dame." Esmeralda is a gipsy street-singer. A profligate priest, Claude Frollo, is in love with her, and, aided by Quasimodo, the dwarf bell-

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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ringer of Notre Dame, he endeavours to carry her off under dark. The captain of the guard, Phœbus de Châteaupers, rescues her, and in turn succumbs to her charms. Frollo gets away, but Quasimodo is arrested. Esmeralda pleads for him, and he is liberated. In gratitude Quasimodo vows himself her slave for the future. Frollo's wrath is roused by Esmeralda's preference for Phœbus, whom he therefore assassinates, fixing the crime on Esmeralda. The latter is condemned to death, but Phœbus was not killed after all, and turns up opportunely to save the gipsy. His murder is once more attempted by Frollo; but Quasimodo, sacrificing himself for Esmeralda's happiness, receives the blow instead.

This is the story as in the original score. Various changes were made by the composer when the opera was produced in French at Covent Garden, in 1890, and an important addition, in the form of an elaborate scene for Esmeralda in the prison, was introduced. But the first version is generally preferred as being better.

Goring Thomas was a facile, refined, and musicianly writer, with a rich endowment of melody, and these qualities are all reflected in his *chef-d'œuvre*. The libretto offered him plenty of romantic material, and he made good use of it. "The work," says Mr. Fuller Maitland, "is dramatic and effective in no ordinary degree; every part is not merely grateful to the singer, but is characteristic of the personages

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## THOMAS'S "ESMERALDA"

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invented by Victor Hugo. In spite of this, such are the strange ways of English operatic managers, that it has never taken the place in the regular repertory which it would have held if it had been written by a Frenchman for the French."

Nevertheless, "Esmeralda" speedily became popular in London and the provinces, and was even performed (in 1885) at Cologne and Hamburg. Subsequently it was produced, as indicated, at Covent Garden, by Sir Augustus Harris, with Melba and Jean de Reszke in the cast. The song, "Oh, vision entrancing!" was long a favourite in Mr. Edward Lloyd's repertoire. "Nadeschda," an opera dealing with a Russian subject, achieved much popularity when first produced by the Carl Rosa Company in 1885, but although it contains some attractive music, notably for the ballet, it has not maintained its hold on the opera-going public. Its mezzo-soprano air, "My heart is weary," used to be one of the most hackneyed pieces in popular usage, and the tenor song, "Now is the hour of soft enchantment," came near it in that respect.

# “ BUTTERFLY,” “ BOHÈME,” AND “ TOSCA ”

## THE COMPOSER

GIACOMO PUCCINI comes of a race of musicians. The second of the name, and the fifth musician of his family, he was born at Lucca in 1858. He was one of six children, all of whom were so devoted to the art that their house was described by a friend as a gigantic musical-box. The father, Michele, died when his most gifted son was only six years old, and Giacomo's education was continued by his great-uncle, Dr. Nicolao Cerù, till he received a pension from the Queen of Italy sufficient to enable him to study at the Milan Conservatoire for a year. When this pension expired, Dr. Cerù again came to his assistance and provided the necessary funds for the completion of his studies. At the close of the course at the Conservatoire, his *Sinfonia-Capriccio* for orchestra was performed and very favourably received.

Ponchielli, who had been his master, was so struck with the dramatic bent of his mind that he promised to find him a suitable “ book ” for an opera. At his suggestion Puccini wrote “ *Le Villi*,” to the libretto of Fontana, in view of the first of the “ Con-

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## THE HISTORY

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corsi" (Competitions) instituted by the publisher Sonzogno. It failed to win the prize, but was produced at the Teatro dal Verme, in 1884, with such success that it was bought by Ricordi and given at La Scala a few months later. His second work, "Edgar," which was presented at the same theatre in 1889, did not increase his popularity, largely owing to the weakness of the libretto. After some years came "Manon Lescaut," showing a wonderful advance in his art; while in "La Bohème," first heard at Turin in 1896, he surpassed all his previous achievements and asserted his position as one of the foremost living operatic composers. "La Tosca," produced at Rome in 1900, did not enhance his reputation, owing perhaps to the rather sordid character of the story; but it is often performed in England, and is apparently enjoyed. So far, however, "Madam Butterfly" remains its composer's greatest triumph.

All music lovers are looking forward with much interest to further work from his pen, which it is hoped will carry this richly endowed son of the Muses to a still higher place in the temple of fame.

### "BUTTERFLY"—THE HISTORY

During a visit to London, Puccini witnessed a performance of the little play, "Madam Butterfly,"

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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an adaptation by David Belasco of the magazine story so entitled by John Luther Long. That gifted artist, Miss Evelyn Millard, enacted the part of the heroine with rare feeling, and the composer was charmed and touched by her performance, though he knew no English. Returning to Italy, he commissioned Messrs. Illica and Giacosa to write a libretto on the subject. In order to provide fuller scope for Puccini, the librettists placed a new Act in front of the English drama. Besides affording, by its prevailing brightness, a fine contrast to the pathos of the second part, this addition enabled the listener to obtain a better knowledge of the circumstances leading up to the tragedy of the last scene.

The work was produced at La Scala in 1904, but for some unknown reason, perhaps because of its unfamiliar Japanese character, it failed to please, and was withdrawn after one performance. It was then condensed, divided into two Acts (having been originally played in one), and the tenor air added in the last scene. A few months later it was given at Brescia in its revised form, when it was received with tumultuous applause. In July 1905 the opera made a most successful début at Covent Garden, Destinn, Caruso, and Scotti playing the principal rôles, and ever since it has been a great favourite with all classes of the musical public. The fine English version of the libretto, made by Mrs. R. H. Elkin, and admirably fitting the accentuation of

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## THE STORY

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the music, was sung for the first time at Washington, in October 1906, by Henry Savage's Opera Company; and shortly after, it was presented at the Garden Theatre, New York, where it ran for three months to crowded and enthusiastic houses. In the summer of 1907 the Moody-Manners Company gave the first performance in English in Great Britain at the Lyric Theatre, London, Mdme. Fanny Moody impersonating the heroine, with Joseph O'Mara as Pinkerton, and Llewys James as the Consul. It has been played in all the principal cities of the Provinces by this Company, and everywhere the verdict of London has been confirmed.

## THE STORY

The great success of "Madam Butterfly" is not difficult to understand. To begin with, the libretto is exceptionally strong; unlike most opera "books," it would have made a powerful drama without music. The authors have treated in masterly fashion a story which, in its original form, possessed no special merit; they have transformed Belasco's adaptation of an ordinary tale into a compact play of engrossing interest and infinite pathos. The dramatic action, of paramount importance, is swift and inevitable. The general gaiety of the first Act presents the necessary contrast to the gloom of the later scenes,

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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which gradually deepens as the tragedy draws near. The characters are boldly drawn, and have well-defined personalities; the dialogue is clever and to the point; and the language of the love passages is highly poetical and very vocal. Local colour and all details are utilised in a most artistic way to make the heroine stand out—a picturesque, pathetic figure, commanding admiration, love, and sympathy. Nothing interferes with, everything adds to, the main interest of the work—the fate of that quaint, fascinating Geisha, the loving, lovable, heroic little Butterfly. No wonder the “book” proved an inspiration to the composer.

Though the scene of “Madam Butterfly” is laid in Japan, the story is not essentially Japanese, any more than the plot of “Faust” is essentially German. It is, in fact, a presentation of a universal theme—

Man's love is of his life a thing apart;  
'Tis woman's whole existence.

**ACT 1.**—The curtain rises on a Japanese house, with its terrace and garden. Below, in the background, are the bay, harbour, and town of Nagasaki. From a back-room Goro, the marriage-broker, leads in Pinkerton obsequiously, drawing his attention to the details of the structure. They go down into the garden, and the servants whom Goro has engaged for the household are introduced to their new master.





'In everlasting torment  
May your wicked soul perish



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## THE STORY

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Then the broker, while keeping a look-out for the bride and her party, enumerates the expected guests.

The first to arrive is Sharpless, the American Consul, breathless after climbing the steep ascent to the house. Pinkerton, having ordered refreshments, discusses the beautiful view with his friend, and tells him that he has bought this picturesque dwelling for 999 years, with the option of cancelling the contract every month. Inviting Sharpless to be seated, he gives him a taste of his philosophy in a characteristic song. "The whole world over, on business and pleasure, the Yankee travels all danger scorning. His anchor boldly he casts at random, until a sudden squall upsets his ship, then up go sails and rigging. And life is not worth living if he can't win the best and fairest of each country, and the heart of each maid."

Acting on this theory, he is now marrying in Japanese fashion, tied for 999 years, yet free to annul the marriage monthly. Sharpless interrupts the song to remark that this is "an easy gospel which makes life very pleasant, but is fatal in the end." The Lieutenant, however, pays no attention to his friend's warning. He goes on to explain how he has been fascinated by the quaint little girl, who "seems to have stepped down straight from a screen," and who is so like her namesake the butterfly, that a wild wish had seized him to rush after her, "though

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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in the quest her frail wings should be broken." The Consul has not yet seen the bride, but he has heard her speak, and her voice has touched his soul. "Surely," he says, "love that is pure and true speaks like that. It were indeed sad pity to tear those dainty wings and perhaps torment a trusting heart." The Lieutenant nevertheless will not allow that any harm can come to Butterfly through him. Raising his glass, Sharpless drinks to friends and relations at home; Pinkerton, showing how far from seriously he takes this love affair, drinks to the day on which he will wed "in real marriage, a real wife from America.'

At this moment the bridal party are heard singing in the distance. As they approach, praising the beauty of the surrounding scene, the bride's voice is added to the chorus, in strains expressing her joy at standing on the threshold of love. At last she appears on the stage with her girl friends, all carrying large, bright-coloured sunshades, and making a very pretty picture. After the exchange of greetings, Sharpless inquires if the bride comes from Nagasaki. In reply she tells him the story of her life. She was rich at one time, but, becoming poor, had to go as a Geisha to earn her living. Her mother is still alive; her father, alas, is dead; one uncle is the Bonze, a miracle of wisdom; the other, Yakuside, is a perpetual tippler. Then with childish coquetry she makes the Consul guess her age. She is fifteen, "the age of playthings and sweetmeats."

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## THE STORY

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Presently Goro announces new arrivals—the august High Commissioner, the Official Registrar, and the relatives. The bride and her girl friends receive the quaint group, while Pinkerton, taking Sharpless to one side, laughingly remarks: “What a farce is this procession of my worthy new relations, held on terms of monthly contract!” Butterfly now points out the bridegroom to her kinsfolk, who in turn proceed to criticise Pinkerton’s looks with great candour. Most of them think him handsome, a few have a different opinion.

At this stage the Consul examines the papers for the contract. Pinkerton, meanwhile, approaching Butterfly, finds her rather embarrassed. She is drawing from her sleeves the few treasures she had not wished to part with on entering on her new life—silken kerchiefs, a coloured ribbon, a little silver buckle, a mirror, a fan, and a tiny jar of carmine. Her most sacred possession, a long narrow sheath, she lays down reverently. This, Goro whispers, was sent by the Mikado to her father with a command, which he obeyed—and the broker imitates the action of suicide. Last of all, Butterfly takes some images from her sleeves, the souls of her forefathers, the “Ottokè.” In confidential tones she tells her lover that, for his sake, and unknown to her family, she has been to the mission, abjured her own religion, and adopted his. To give him more pleasure, she can almost forget her race and kindred. “Away

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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they go," she cries, throwing down the Ottokè, just as Goro approaches Sharpless and having received the Consul's orders shouts "Silence!" The chattering ceases, they all leave off eating and drinking, and coming forward in a circle, in the centre of which stand the bride and bridegroom, they listen with much interest to the wedding ceremony, performed by the Commissioner. After the signing of the papers, the friends congratulate Butterfly, and the function is over.

The Commissioner, the Registrar, and Sharpless take their leave together, but the Consul turns back for a moment to again warn his friend to be careful. Pinkerton reassures him, and waving his hand from the background, returns to the front, to get rid of the family party as quickly as possible. He plies them with cakes and wine, and they are all drinking the health of the newly married couple, when suddenly strange cries are heard coming from the path on the hill; the tam-tam sounds from the distance, and the voice of the Bonze shouts, "Cho-cho-san! Abomination!" The guests are awe-struck and huddle together in terror. In the background there appears the odd figure of the Buddhist priest. At sight of Butterfly he stretches out his hands menacingly. "What were you doing at the mission?" he cries, and receiving no answer, informs the party: "She has renounced her true religion, she has renounced us all!" He approaches

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## THE STORY

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his niece in a fury, and hurls imprecations at the poor girl till Pinkerton loses patience, and intervening between the priest and the bride, loudly bids him hold his peace and begone. The relatives join the Bonze in denouncing Butterfly, and as they retire, their curses are heard for some time growing faint in the distance.

Butterfly, thoroughly upset by this scene, bursts into tears, and her husband, who has watched the departure of his guests from the back, hastens forward to comfort her.

Just then Butterfly's maid, Suzuki, is heard within at her evening prayer, and the lovers move towards the house. The servants close the shosi; Suzuki assists her mistress to change her wedding dress for one of pure white; and at last the bride and bridegroom are left alone. While Butterfly arranges her hair, Pinkerton watches her and soliloquises on her graceful prettiness and alluring charm. Presently he leads her to the terrace.

And now they breathe out their mutual devotion 'mid the beauties of an Eastern night, willingly yielding themselves to the passionate influence of the heaven and earth around them, of which they feel themselves a part. Twice during this exquisite love scene, Butterfly is disturbed by thoughts of the anathemas of her people, only to be reassured by the protestations of her husband, whom she has for the time being completely fascinated by her innocent

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## F A V O U R I T E O P E R A S

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charm. She naïvely confesses she had not wished to marry him when his offer first came to her through the marriage-broker, but she loved him whenever she saw him, and now he is all the world to her, now she is perfectly happy. Very pathetic is her prayer: "Ah, love me a little, just a very little, as you would love a baby; 'tis all that I ask for. I come of a people accustomed to little; grateful for love that's silent, light as a blossom, and yet everlasting as the sky, as the fathomless ocean."

When Pinkerton calls her his butterfly, her face clouds over, and she reminds him: "They say that in your country, if a butterfly is caught by a man, he'll pierce its heart with a needle and leave it to perish." Her lover's embrace, however, chases away the painful thought, and gazing at the starlit sky they join in praising the glory of the night, pouring out their rapture on the sleeping world around. Pinkerton leads his bride from the garden into the house, and the curtain falls on a scene full of poetry, charm, and passion.

ACT 2, FIRST PART.—Three years have passed when the curtain rises again on the interior of Butterfly's house. Suzuki, coiled up before the image of Buddha, is praying, and from time to time she rings the prayer-bell to invoke the attention of the gods. Butterfly is standing rigid and motionless near a screen. At last the maid goes to a small cabinet, and, opening a casket, shows her mistress



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## THE STORY

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a very few coins. Unless her husband comes back quickly they are in a sad plight. Suzuki has little faith in Pinkerton's home-coming after so long an absence. This provokes Butterfly's anger, and to warrant her belief in her husband, she quotes his last promise to her, to "return with the roses, the warm and sunny season, when the redbreasted robins are busy nesting." Then she prettily depicts his arrival, acting the scene as though it were really taking place.

She has scarcely recovered from the entrancement of this beautiful day-dream when Goro and Sharpless appear in the garden. The Consul enters to the great joy of Butterfly. Anxious to explain the object of his visit, he produces a letter which he tells her is from Pinkerton. "Then I'm the happiest woman in Japan," she exclaims; yet before she will hear it, she must ask a question: "At what time of the year do the robins nest in America?" In Japan they have built thrice already since her husband's departure. In America perhaps they may build more rarely? Goro, who has been listening on the terrace, bursts out laughing. Sharpless, in a confused manner, declares that he has not studied ornithology. He tries to reopen the subject of the letter, but Goro's presence reminds Butterfly to inform the Consul that her husband was scarcely gone before the broker endeavoured to induce her to marry again; that he had offered her half-a-dozen

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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suitors, and now wishes her to wed a wealthy idiot, Prince Yamadori.

Just then the Prince is seen on the terrace. He enters with great pomp, greets the Consul, bows most graciously to Butterfly, and sits down between them. Although she makes fun of him and teases him unmercifully, Yamadori is ready to swear eternal faith to the charming Butterfly. The devoted little woman, however, insists that she is still Pinkerton's wife, and therefore cannot wed another. To put an end to the discussion she pours out tea for her guests. Goro, meanwhile, whispers to Sharpless that the Lieutenant's ship is already signalled. The Consul is in despair as to how he is to deliver his message, when Yamadori, rising, takes a sorrowful farewell of Butterfly, who laughs behind her fan at his grotesque figure in the throes of love. Goro follows the Prince.

At last Sharpless manages to begin the reading of the letter. Many times he is interrupted by the excited girl; and she is so convinced of Pinkerton's loyalty that the Consul has not the heart to tell her plainly what she must expect. Instead of finishing the letter, he asks her what she would do were she never to see her husband again. The poor soul, looking as if she had received a death-blow, stammers out: "Two things I might do: go back and entertain the people with my songs, or else better to die." Sharpless is deeply moved. He is

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## THE STORY

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loath indeed to destroy her illusion, but he urges her to accept the wealthy Yamadori. Coming from one she had thought of as her husband's friend and her own, this suggestion wounds her cruelly. She is nearly fainting, when she suddenly revives, and running out of the room, returns triumphantly carrying her baby on her shoulder—the son that had been born after Pinkerton's departure.

In a highly dramatic song to the child she describes how she may yet have to take him in her arms and sing and dance in the street to earn a living. In her imagination she pictures the boy being noticed by the Emperor, who will ultimately make him “the most exalted ruler of his kingdom.” Sharpless, conquering his emotion, inquires the baby's name and receives this reply from Butterfly, who with childlike grace addresses her son: “Give answer—Sir, my name now is Trouble, but yet write and tell my father that on the day of his returning, Joy shall be my name.” The Consul promises that the father shall be told, and takes his leave.

In a few minutes Suzuki enters, dragging in Goro. The despicable creature has been spreading the scandal all through the town that no one knows who is this baby's father. Butterfly is furious, and seizing the dagger that hangs by the shrine, she threatens to kill the broker. The maid throws herself between them, and carries off the child, while Goro escapes.

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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Suddenly the cannon announces the arrival in the harbour of a man-of-war. Suzuki comes in breathlessly, and both run to the terrace. Butterfly, looking through a telescope, exclaims "*The Abraham Lincoln!*" (Pinkerton's ship), and in a state of excitement reproaches the maid for her want of faith. Immediately they begin to decorate the room with flowers from the garden, at the same time giving vocal expression to their rapture and joyous anticipation of the long-expected meeting. Finally, when the garden has been robbed of every blossom, Suzuki helps to dress her mistress in her wedding garment, and to adorn the baby. Night falls, and the maid closes the shosi, in which Butterfly makes three holes. Beside these they settle themselves to watch and wait for the wanderer's return. The moonbeams light up the shosi from without, and, as the sound of singing comes from the distance, the baby and Suzuki fall asleep. Butterfly remains rigid and motionless. The sounds die away, while the curtain falls.

SECOND PART.—It rises again upon the same scene and situation, though the midnight hours are past and the dawn is at hand. Butterfly is still gazing out into the distance; Suzuki and the child are asleep. The day breaks, and Butterfly, rousing herself, carries the boy upstairs, singing a lullaby on the way. The maid has just had time to open the shosi, when there is a knocking at the door, and

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## THE STORY

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presently, to her surprise, Pinkerton and Sharpless enter, very quietly, bidding her not disturb her mistress. Seeing a lady in the garden, she eagerly demands: "Who's that?" After a little hesitation, Sharpless replies: "His wife." The faithful Suzuki is stupefied with grief. The Consul tries to soothe her, and explains that they have come very early in order to see her alone and get her help. While Pinkerton walks about the room in great agitation, noticing the flowers, the image of Buddha, and all the familiar details, Sharpless tells Suzuki that the future of the little one is their first and special thought. If Butterfly will entrust the child to Mrs. Pinkerton, it shall have a mother's care. He persuades her to go to that lady and hear what she has to say.

The Lieutenant, while giving his friend some money for Butterfly, confesses his sorrow and remorse for having thoughtlessly caused all this terrible suffering. The Consul now recalls how he had cautioned him not to trifle with the girl's affection, and had foretold the end, if he persisted in deceiving her. After bidding a sad farewell to the home where he had once known such happiness, and declaring that he will always be haunted by Butterfly's reproachful eyes, Pinkerton wrings the Consul's hand and goes out quickly.

Mrs. Pinkerton and Suzuki enter from the garden, talking about the child. Butterfly is now heard calling Suzuki from the room above, and, though the

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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maid attempts to prevent her coming down, she will not be hindered. She assumes her husband has arrived and looks for him in every corner; then, seeing the American lady, she seems at last to understand the situation. Mrs. Pinkerton would fain take her hand, but Butterfly decidedly though kindly refuses to be approached. "Neath the blue vault of the sky, there is no happier lady than you are. May you remain so, nor e'er be saddened through me. Yet it would please me much that you should tell him that peace will come to me." Thus she addresses the woman who, through no fault of her own, is the cause of her despair. She listens to the other's pleading for the child, and solemnly promises that the father shall have his son if he will come to fetch him in half-an-hour. Sharpless and the lady withdraw, feeling utterly helpless to console this anguished yet noble spirit.

Butterfly, on the point of collapse, gradually rallies, and seeing that it is broad daylight, bids Suzuki draw the curtains, so that the room is in almost total darkness. The maid reluctantly leaves her, weeping bitterly. After a few moments Butterfly lifts a white veil from the shrine and throws it over the screen, then taking the dagger from its case, she reads the inscription: "Death with honour is better than life with dishonour!" She is pointing the blade at her throat, when the door opens, showing Suzuki's arm pushing in the child. With out-

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## THE MUSIC

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stretched hands he runs to his mother, who lets the dagger fall, and almost smothers him with kisses. In a sublime outburst of love and despair she bids farewell to this "adored being." For the sake of the child's future she will take her own life, that he may go away beyond the ocean, and never feel when he is older that his mother forsook him.

At last she sets the baby on a stool, and gives him the American flag and a doll to play with, while she gently bandages his eyes. Seizing the dagger she disappears behind the screen. The knife is heard falling. Butterfly emerges with a long white veil around her neck, and, tottering, gropes her way towards the boy. She has just enough strength left to embrace him, then sinks by his side. At this moment Pinkerton is heard outside calling "Butterfly," the door is thrown open, and the Lieutenant and Sharpless rush into the room. With a feeble gesture the dying girl points to the child and breathes her last. The Consul takes the little one in his arms, sobbing, Pinkerton falls on his knees, and the curtain descends.

## THE MUSIC<sup>1</sup>

The outstanding feature of the music is its fitness to the stage picture. It emphasises the dramatic

<sup>1</sup> The music quotations are given by kind permission of Messrs. Ricordi & Co., London, the owners of all copyrights in the text and music of "Madam Butterfly."

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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situation, intensifies the emotional expression of the text, and throughout gives the appropriate atmosphere to the work.

The first bars take the listener to Japan, and he leaves that land of flowers only when the last chord has brought down the curtain. The music allotted to Pinkerton and Sharpless has naturally no Japanese flavour, and the love music is not specially Oriental in character, for love is cosmopolitan and its language universal; but the rest of the work is essentially Japanese. Particularly so are certain parts distinguished by archaic intervals and restless tonality. Indeed, in several cases Japanese melodies have been incorporated in the score, notably the melody which accompanies Goro's enumeration of the guests, the Butterfly motive, and the Yamadori theme, so strongly reminiscent of the Mikado's theme in Sullivan's masterpiece. Yet the composer's nationality betrays itself in orchestration and otherwise, and certainly none but an Italian could have written the great Love-Duet.

If Puccini's own melodies are in themselves not always original—they occasionally remind us of Gounod, Verdi, and others—his treatment of them is uniformly happy. In some cases they are very beautiful and haunting; for example, the melodies of the first chorus and the Love-Duet, the Consul's motive, and perhaps finest of all, Butterfly's farewell to her child. Concerted vocal writing is not the



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## THE MUSIC

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composer's forte, judging from his handling of the trio in the last scene, which would have afforded a greater master an excellent opportunity of displaying his skill in this branch of composition.

Puccini, like Wagner, discards all conventional forms except such as arise naturally out of the subject under consideration. Thus it happens that in "Madam Butterfly" the chorus work is slight (what there is, by the way, scarcely showing the composer at his best), and there is an absence of what may be called "set numbers." The music runs on continuously from start to finish, and the chief melodies are often given to the orchestra, which here plays a more important part than in any of Puccini's earlier operas. The characters are aptly illustrated in the music assigned to each of them; and the leit-motive is used with consistency and discrimination. The work as a whole is full of interest and charm, and in the last scene rises to a great height of dramatic power, spiritual insight, and musical beauty.

ACT 1.—There is no overture or prelude to the opera. The lively and characteristic theme of the short introduction at once creates the atmosphere of Japan, and prepares us for the scene that meets our eyes on the rising of the curtain. This phrase, which is given out by the first violins, and here developed fugally by the other strings, recurs frequently during the earlier scenes, and may be

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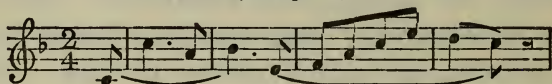
## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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regarded as typical of a Japanese marriage and all the gaiety and bustle of the ceremony and reception. It is repeated again and again until Goro begins to enumerate the guests, when he is accompanied by a delightful figure, suggestive of their short tripping step, a figure which is heard later on as the relatives arrive.

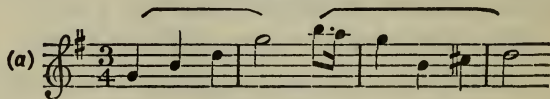
The first of the party, Sharpless, is introduced by a tuneful phrase, throughout associated with the

1. (Sharpless).



Consul, and descriptive of his kindly, sympathetic nature. After Pinkerton has commented upon the elastic nature of Japanese houses and contracts, he sings a suave strain characteristic of his easy-going, optimistic temperament. The opening phrase in the orchestra will be recognised as the melody of "The

2. (Pinkerton).



Star-spangled Banner." It is heard several times in the course of the work, when Pinkerton's nationality is referred to. That his convenient gospel may have fatal consequences, Sharpless points out in a phrase



Exit Yamadori



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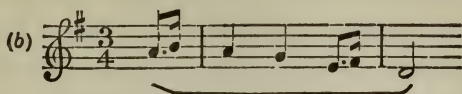


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## THE MUSIC

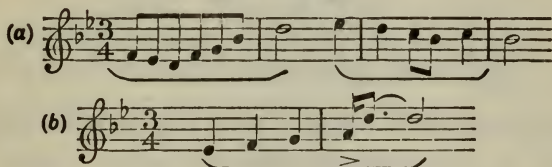
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that recurs in the last scene, where the Consul is justified in his philosophy :



During Goro's absence, Pinkerton describes how he has been fascinated by the little Japanese girl in a dainty, piquant melody, set out with delicate touches of orchestration, suggestive of her grace and butterfly-like charm. A second time Sharpless warns him, now in the following themes, also heard in the second Act, telling him that this child is not to be

### 3 (Warning).



trifled with. He drinks to Pinkerton's friends and relatives at home, to the accompaniment of the warning motive (3a), and when the Lieutenant also raises his glass to his future American wife, the phrase (3b) continues the timely advice. Now Goro returns, announcing the approach of the bridal party. He sings a quaint Japanese phrase that forms an accompaniment to the first strains of their voices, heard in the distance, then nearer, and at last in

## FAVOURITE OPERAS

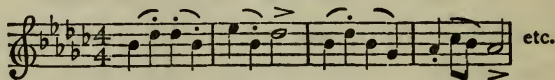
full force on the stage. In this lovely chorus the girl-friends of the bride sing in praise of nature—the sea, sky, and flowers, as seen from the path leading to the house, and Butterfly at the same time reveals her anticipation of great happiness, supported by the delicious flowing melody of the orchestra. The broad themes of this movement are afterwards used in the duet at the end of the Act, where the lovers declare their mutual passion, intensified by the beauty of the night and the surrounding scene. As the number closes with a burst of ecstasy, Butterfly appears on

### 4 (Love).



the stage with her friends, and the motive representing her is given out in the orchestra. Just as the theme (2a) seems to depict the light-hearted Ameri-

### 5. (Butterfly).



can, so this mysterious, haunting tune admirably characterises the dainty, delicate creature, whose love is her existence, fragile and elusive like her namesake the Butterfly, yet capable of tragic self-sacrifice for the sake of the adored one.

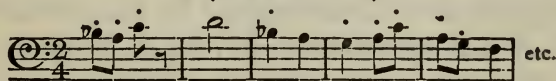
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## THE MUSIC

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During the simple and artless recital of the story of her life, Butterfly sings to the words—"But the strongest oak must fall, when the storm-wind wrecks the forest"—a phrase which must be noted. It is developed from one occurring in the unison passage of Eastern tonality that ushers in her girl friends. Here the phrase refers to the poverty which caused her to become a Geisha. Later on it recurs twice—in the First Part of the second Act, when Goro tries to persuade Butterfly that she is deserted by her husband, and, being very poor, ought to marry the wealthy Yamadori; and again in the opening bars of the orchestral introduction to the Second Part, where it indicates that her desertion by her husband will lead to a tragic end. Another important motive is introduced when the death of Butterfly's father is referred to, the motive of self-destruction, which has a peculiarly crude Japanese flavour. This theme,

6. (Self-destruction).



here incomplete, will soon be heard in a more developed form. Refreshments are brought from the house into the garden to the accompaniment of the marriage theme, and the figure heard before, when Goro enumerated the guests, announces the arrival of the Commissioner, the Registrar, and the relatives. This merry, fascinating measure is con-

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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tinued while the new-comers express their very candid opinions of the bridegroom. As the chorus proceeds, Sharpless offers Pinkerton his congratulations in a bold, striking phrase that stands out from the chattering of the other guests, with which it is cleverly combined.

While the Consul, with the other officials, gets the bond ready and the guests are regaling themselves, the bridegroom approaches the bride, and the

7.

(a)  
(The Curse.

A musical score for a piano accompaniment. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The time signature is 2/4. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The music is written in a blocky, chordal style. The treble staff contains a melodic line with some grace notes and a fermata over the final measure. The bass staff contains a harmonic accompaniment with chords and some single notes. The number '7.' is centered above the staves. The label '(a) (The Curse.' is to the left of the staves.

beautiful and passionate love melody (4a) rises pianissimo from the orchestra. When Goro whispers to Pinkerton that the dagger, Butterfly's greatest treasure, was sent to her father by the Mikado, the motive of self-destruction (6) occurs in its complete form. Presently Butterfly sings her own theme, (5) telling how she has renounced her religion to adopt her lover's.

After the wedding ceremony the orchestra breaks into a quick, rollicking measure while the relatives are feasting. Then with the Bonze's denunciation there is heard a weird, uncanny phrase, signifying that Butterfly is cursed and cast off by her kindred.



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## THE MUSIC

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This theme (7*a*), consisting of an archaic progression of three major thirds, continues to assert itself till all the relatives have left the stage, when it passes into the gloomy motive of self-destruction (6), which, after more execrations, growing fainter in the distance, and more of the (7*a*) figure, reasserts itself, as the lovers are left in peace and the daylight wanes.

At this moment Suzuki is heard within chanting her evening prayer, the marriage theme sounds from the orchestra, and there commences the exquisite Love-Duet. One of the finest parts of the work, it is remarkable for wealth and beauty of melody, for grace and charm of character, and for passionate abandonment. The movement begins with the communing of the lovers, accompanied by a sweet, soothing melody, which with its dreamy, rhythmic flow is wonderfully suggestive of the restful stillness of the summer night, and presents a delightful contrast to the noise and bustle of the wedding ceremony. It is interrupted by a snatch of the marriage motive, when Butterfly retires to a corner at the back to change her wedding garment for one of pure white, and again when the curse (7*a*) theme breaks in and accompanies her recollection of the Bonze's male dictions.

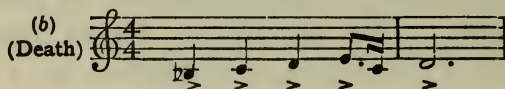
At last all but their mutual love is forgotten as the couple go out on the terrace, and under the starry heavens give fervid expression to the bliss in their hearts. Pinkerton's flowing phrases are

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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answered by Butterfly's characteristically dainty measures. Then, becoming more responsive, Butterfly pours out her absorbing devotion in exalted strains, echoed by the orchestra. Even yet, however, she cannot entirely forget her relatives' harshness, and again the curse motive (7a) intrudes for a moment on her happiness. But she immediately recovers herself, and continues more ardently, expressing her contentment and felicity in her lot. Following the words, "Yes, I am happy," there is the first suggestion of a phrase, afterwards to play an important part in the second Act. It is



developed from the curse theme, and may be taken to signify the fulfilment of the curse in the death of the heroine. In this place it suggests that her bliss will end in despair, that her trusting love will bring her great suffering.

Meanwhile she tenderly beseeches her husband to "love her a little, just a very little," in a simple pathetic melody, to which the orchestra whispers an ethereal accompaniment. This short, haunting phrase rises higher and higher, and is finally taken up by Pinkerton, when it culminates in a passionate outburst, in which he declares that she is aptly named his Butterfly, and the orchestra resumes the

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## THE MUSIC

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broad, exalted strain already heard. Thereupon the bride reminds her lover of the fate of the butterfly in his country, and at this point the curse motive (7*a*) rises once more like a presentiment that her own fate may be similar—that her heart may be pierced by the one who has caught her. Her fears are quickly dispelled by her husband's assurances and caresses. The music becomes still more passionate, the orchestral accompaniment grows more intense, until the love theme is heard in its entirety, and is worked up by both voices and orchestra to a magnificent climax fortissimo, and then merges into Butterfly's motive in the orchestra alone. This fascinating air diminishes to a tender pianissimo, as Pinkerton leads his bride from the garden, and together they disappear into the house. Here may be noted the unusual close on the sixth of the key, as the curtain falls on this wonderfully touching and poetical love idyl.

ACT 2, FIRST PART.—After a few bars of introduction, seemingly evolved from the death motive (7*b*), the curtain rises. The curse theme (7*a*) is heard in the orchestra, then the death motive (7*b*). This is followed by Suzuki's prayer that her mistress may be comforted. Presently a forceful, decisive theme accompanies Butterfly's fears that the gods of Japan will be of little use to them. This theme, which appears to denote her belief in her husband's loyalty, recurs in the orchestra in a persistent manner.

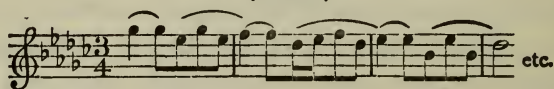
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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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In a phrase associated with her husband's return and also later on with the child, the faithful Butterfly recalls his promise to come back to her when the robins are nesting, the chirping of the birds being indicated in the accompaniment; and she displays her trust in his fidelity by describing their happy reunion in a charming song. The introduction here

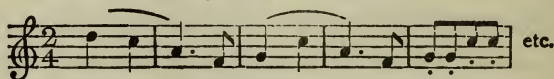
### 8. (Return).



of the death motive in unison appears to presage that she will not survive the meeting. When the concluding symphony dies away, the Consul's motive, and the marriage theme with its attendant strains, announce the arrival of Sharpless in the company of Goro.

During the scene between the Consul and Butterfly, the warning phrase (2*b*) is repeated frequently, pointing to the fulfilment of Sharpless' prophecy in the first Act. Here also a theme

### 9. (Yamadori).



representing Yamadori is heard for the first time. Its occurrence at this stage seems to hint that Sharpless is going to favour the suit of this wealthy



The end



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## THE MUSIC

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lover. When Butterfly inquires of the Consul concerning the nesting-time of the robins in America, the twittering of the birds is again suggested in the orchestra. As the Prince enters, his melody is proclaimed fortissimo, the basses in unison accompanied by the full orchestra. This melody, and the music of this scene generally, have a specially Japanese character. During the interview Butterfly lets them all understand that she still considers herself married to Pinkerton, and therefore, however poor she may be, she cannot accept Yamadori. At this point there is given out in the orchestra the theme already referred to, first sung by Butterfly to the words—“But the strongest oak must fall, when the storm-wind wrecks the forest.”

Presently the poor girl grows excited, and the music reflects the state of her mind, as she expounds her idea of the American law of divorce. Tea is handed round to a phrase in dainty slow waltz rhythm, then Yamadori's theme accompanies his departure, after which Sharpless' motive is repeated as he settles down to read Pinkerton's letter to Butterfly. Here a passage occurs, which was heard first in the Love-Duet, when the fate of the Butterfly was referred to. The symphony which accompanies the letter, and which will be heard again at the end of this part of the Act, consists of a repetition of a short phrase for the lower strings, with pizzicato and wood-wind accompaniment, and as the reading proceeds

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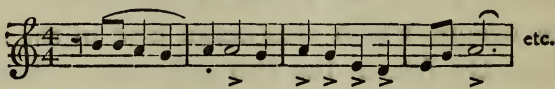
## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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a charming melody is whispered by the higher strings.

When Butterfly runs off to fetch her child, the orchestra bursts fortissimo into the love motive (4a), now in more jubilant rhythm. It merges into a theme, already associated with her husband's return, and here associated with the baby, as the mother shows her treasure to the Consul. This melody is continued in the orchestra, while she is speaking of the child, but it is interrupted by snatches of the "Star-spangled Banner" theme; by the phrase expressing her belief in her husband's return, as she exclaims, "Can such as he be forgotten?" and afterwards by a reminiscence of the love motive (4a), when she says he was born after his father's departure. In the extremely pathetic song to the baby, a sombre, striking theme, principally heard in unison, seems to denote the sacrifice which the mother will eventually make for the sake of her son's future. This melody and the phrase associated with the first

10. (Child's future).



appearance of the child, form the main features of a most touching and dramatic number. Sharpless' motive is heard as he takes leave of Butterfly, and as the devoted wife joyfully anticipates her husband's



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## THE MUSIC

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home-coming, the beautiful haunting air (8) is sung out by the orchestra.

Suddenly loud cries are heard outside, and Suzuki enters, dragging in Goro, who has been maligning her mistress in the town. This passage is accompanied throughout by the curse theme. Full of violence and hate, it presents a fine contrast to the scenes preceding and following it, where the tenderness of the mother's love is so beautifully expressed. And now a cannon-shot announces that the *Abraham Lincoln* has arrived in the harbour. While Butterfly and Suzuki run towards the terrace, the theme of return (8) is repeated. In an ecstasy of gladness Butterfly bursts into the charming Flower-Duet with Suzuki. This number is somewhat marred by a restlessness of tonality, scarcely warranted by the subject, and the opening is rather commonplace and reminiscent. As a whole, however, it is distinguished by suave melody, and picturesque and dainty tripping accompaniment; and it very happily suggests the spring, the season of love and joy. Butterfly dons her wedding garment to the first theme of the Love-Duet, heard while she was adorning herself on the bridal eve. As night falls the passage that accompanied the reading of the letter rises like a murmur from the orchestra, while sopranos and tenors behind the scenes sing the beautiful melody *bouche fermée*. The strains grow fainter as the curtain slowly falls.

SECOND PART.—The orchestral prelude to the

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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Second Part commences with the bold theme sung by Butterfly in the first Act, when she tells of her poverty, and heard again in the scene with Yamadori, when she refuses to believe that she is no longer the wife of Pinkerton. Here it is a premonition of her desertion and the impending catastrophe. This is followed by a phrase also heard before, in the Love-Duet, when the bride confesses that at first she had not wished to accept the Lieutenant's offer through the broker. Presently there begins softly a barcarolle-like movement, which, after flowing along for some time, works up with snatches of the Love-Duet, the  $\frac{1}{8}^2$  rhythm being maintained. Then there is a reiteration of the second phrase, each time higher and higher, until cries of sailors are heard in the distance. The clanging of chains and anchors sounds from the harbour, after which the inexorable motive of death (7*b*) occurs in unison, creating an atmosphere of hopelessness and despair. At last the curtain rises as a new theme is softly enunciated in the orchestra. This marked rhythmic phrase suggests a chorus of sailors at work in the dawn. It is followed by the Butterfly melody, and afterwards repeated several times, higher and higher. As the rosy dawn spreads and the day breaks, it increases in power till it is finally set forth by the brass, the sunshine streams into the room, and Butterfly at length bestirs herself. It gradually fades away, while she turns to the baby and lifts him in her arms. The orchestra

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## THE MUSIC

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gives out the simple lullaby-like phrase associated with the child, and this the mother takes up and sings to her babe on her way to the room above.

When Suzuki hears the knocking at the door, a new theme will be noticed, suggesting the utter hopelessness of Butterfly's position. It accompanies the maid's description of her mistress's weariness after her midnight watch. The moment Mrs. Pinkerton is discovered in the garden the music becomes agitated, and at last the accompaniment ceases altogether while the faithful soul declaims—"Ah, the world is plunged in gloom!" And now Sharpless sings the melody—"I know that for such trouble there is no consolation," already introduced in the orchestra. It is continued there, when the Consul is joined by Pinkerton and Suzuki in a Trio, in which the singers give vent to their emotions in characteristic style. Presently there may be recognised in the orchestra a suggestion of the phrase with which this Part opens. This is followed by the warning themes (*3a* and *b*), while Sharpless reminds Pinkerton of his advice to him before his marriage.

The Lieutenant, seized with overwhelming remorse, bids a passionate farewell to the scene of his former happiness. In the accompaniment of this song a phrase from the Flower-Duet is introduced, emphasising the contrast between the welcome of the husband as pictured by Butterfly and his actual home-coming. Snatches of the marriage theme and

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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the Love-Duet are heard as Mrs. Pinkerton promises to be a mother to the child. Then an ascending chromatic scale in octaves in the bass, accompanied by the strings tremolo, and culminating in a suggestion of the curse motive, describes the trepidation of Suzuki as she tries to prevent her mistress re-entering the room. While Butterfly searches every corner for Pinkerton, a roll on the drums accompanies the reiterated mutterings of the curse theme in the lower wood-wind, which alone continue a wailing phrase, consisting of a series of sustained thirds. This phrase increases the feeling of desolation. Suddenly Butterfly notices the American lady, and as she realises her position, her whispered questions are punctuated by pauses of awful silence in the orchestra. At length the child's theme is heard again—the lady is entreating to be allowed to do something for the son of the man whom they both love. Here a most pathetic touch is added by the recurrence of Sharpless' warning phrase (2*b*). The admonition was unheeded, with disastrous result. While Mrs. Pinkerton goes on pleading for the child, the decisive phrase denoting Butterfly's belief in her husband's return sounds from the orchestra, followed by the curse theme.

Butterfly promises to give up her boy, if the father will come to fetch him in half-an-hour, the death motive meanwhile providing a low-toned accompaniment. From this point onwards the funereal strain is persistently repeated in ever-chang-

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## THE MUSIC

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ing keys till Suzuki draws the curtains, and the room is darkened. Then it passes into the motive suggesting the dawn, only to return again when Suzuki refuses to leave her mistress alone. As the latter takes up the dagger and points it at her throat, the dark, gloomy self-destruction theme prepares us for the end. The noble passage in which the despairing woman bids farewell to her last hope, the idol of her soul, depicts the state of exaltation in which she takes her own life. This is perhaps the finest passage in the whole work. It is replete with dramatic power and maternal passion, and the melody is strikingly beautiful. As Pinkerton is heard outside calling "Butterfly," the solemn, stalking death figure is twice repeated fortissimo by the brass in unison with the strings tremolo, with ghastly, tragic import, then the motive of the child's future is blazed forth by the orchestra with full force, and on the last chord, again as at the end of the first Act, including the sixth of the key, the curtain swiftly descends.

The orchestration as a whole is very picturesque and effective. Where there is so much to praise, it seems almost ungracious to point out defects, which, after all, are perhaps noticeable only to the musician. For instance, the scoring may be said to be very Italian, insomuch as there is a good deal of "top and bottom"—that is, doubling the melody in higher and lower octaves, with lack of richness in the inner parts. Again, there are too many "ad captandum"

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## F A V O U R I T E O P E R A S

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effects, such as may be obtained, for example, from the harp, an instrument which is impressive in inverse ratio to the number of times it is introduced. Then, while there is an entire freedom from blatancy or noisiness, highly commendable in these days of orchestral fireworks, there is occasionally a want of sonority and dramatic vigour. In spite of these blemishes, however, the orchestration remains a strong feature of the opera.

The composer's frequent use of certain pet harmonies and unusual discords, without any apparent reason, amounts to a mannerism, for these lose the effect they would otherwise have, if employed sparingly and for special purposes. One is, moreover, curious to know what Puccini meant by not finishing the opera on the tonic chord. With some composers all this might be felt to be striving after originality and attributed either to a desire to astonish, or to poverty of resource, but that idea is almost precluded by a knowledge of Puccini's work in general.

To sum up, the opera assuredly deserves to live. On a first hearing it fascinates and produces a profound impression. As with all good work, this impression is confirmed on further acquaintance, and the general verdict must ratify the opinion already expressed that "Madam Butterfly" stands out as a distinguished example of modern opera.

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## “LA BOHÈME”

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### “LA BOHÈME”

This was Puccini's fourth work for the stage. It was produced at Turin in 1896, and achieved an immediate success. Next year the Carl Rosa Company presented it in English at Manchester, and a few months later at Covent Garden. In 1899 it was sung at Covent Garden in Italian. Since then it has passed into the regular repertory of all the opera houses where it has been performed, and at the present day, with Melba as Mimi and Caruso as Rudolph, it invariably fills the house.

The opera presents an impressionist picture of a community common to every clime. Its members have subscribed to the Epicurean principle: “Let us eat and drink to-day, for to-morrow we die.” In a word, they live in and for the present. The librettists have drawn their material from Mürger's novel, “*La Vie de Bohème*,” selecting four characteristic scenes and reproducing the spirit rather than the letter of the original. The time is about 1820, in Paris.

ACT 1.—The curtain rises on the bare attic occupied by that quartet of Bohemians, Rudolph the poet, Marcel the artist, Schaunard the musician, and Colline the philosopher. It is Christmas Eve. Rudolph is gazing out of the window; Marcel

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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painting. The cold is so intense that they burn Rudolph's MS. drama to warm their frozen fingers. Presently Colline enters, throwing down a bundle of books he has failed to pawn. Then Schaunard joins the company, having had better fortune. With money given him by an Englishman he has bought provisions and wine. While the Bohemians are enjoying these, the landlord calls for the rent, and is surprised that his tenants can pay. They ply him with drink, get rid of him without paying what they owe, and then divide the sum among themselves.

Leaving Rudolph with pen in hand, the others go off to the Café Momus for supper. Rudolph is disturbed by a knock at the door. It is Mimi, the delicate little seamstress who lives in a tiny chamber near the roof. Her candle has gone out, and when Rudolph relights it the draught extinguishes both it and his own. The room is therefore in darkness. But the poet had noticed that the girl is very pretty, that her hands are unusually small, white, and beautiful. When the pair are groping on the floor for the key which Mimi has dropped, their hands meet, and Rudolph takes Mimi's in his. He tells about his life and invites her confidence. They are mutually attracted and soon pledge their troth. Then they go out and join the others at the café.

ACT 2.—We are in a street in the Latin Quarter. On one side is the Café Momus. Mimi and the quartet of Bohemians are in the crowd. After a



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“ L A B O H È M E ”

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time they sit down to an *al fresco* supper. The fascinating Musetta and her elderly admirer, Alcindoro, arrive and seat themselves at another table. Musetta had quarrelled with Marcel and now wishes to be reconciled. Pretending that her shoe pinches, she sends Alcindoro to buy another pair, and when he is gone, turns to the artist and effusively embraces him. The four Bohemians then depart with the two ladies, leaving Alcindoro to pay the bill for the lot.

ACT 3.—The scene is now the Barrière d'Enfer. Mimi seeks Marcel at a tavern there, to consult him about Rudolph's unhappiness. Through a window Marcel shows the girl her lover asleep in the inn. Rudolph awakes and speaks to Marcel. Mimi hides and overhears. Rudolph loves Mimi truly, but his mad jealousy causes them both much misery. Moreover, Mimi is consumptive: Rudolph fears she is dying, and he is too poor to provide her with necessary luxuries, which a wealthy admirer could supply. Suddenly Mimi's violent coughing reveals her presence, and Rudolph comes forward to embrace her. They agree to part, but not till "the roses blow." Meanwhile Marcel and Musetta have again fallen out, and they also decide to separate.

ACT 4.—We are back in the attic. Mimi and Musetta have forsaken their old friends for rich lovers. Rudolph and Marcel feel very lonely, but keep up an appearance of brightness. The quartet are in a hilarious mood when they are interrupted by

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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Musetta and the dying Mimi. The men are much affected. Musetta sends Marcel to sell her earrings to procure medical aid, while Colline goes off to pawn his coat. But Mimi, after a touching scene with her lover, passes quietly away before the doctor arrives. The friends are overwhelmed with sorrow, and the curtain falls with Rudolph's despairing cry, "Mimi! Mimi!" as he realises that his adored is no more.

The chief feature of the music is the masterly fashion in which the composer has caught the spirit of these four scenes and reflected it in his score. He has given continuity to the whole by his sense of atmosphere. The melodies are fresh and charming, though never particularly striking, and the themes are expertly handled. The characterisation is better than in any of his earlier works, the dramatic points are often made by very simple means, and the orchestration is clever and refined. The strength of the opera, however, lies in the continuity of the music and its spontaneous character.

### "LA TOSCA"

This work was first produced at Rome in January 1900. The libretto is an adaptation of Sardou's famous tragedy. The date is 1800, and the main facts are said to have a historical basis. The story

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## “ L A T O S C A ”

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centres round the doings of Scarpia, the chief of the police in Rome, himself the perpetrator of worse crimes than those he has officially to deal with.

Mario Cavaradossi, an artist at work in a church, encounters Angelotti, a friend and an escaped prisoner seeking sanctuary. Mario befriends him, helping him away in the disguise of a woman. Floria Tosca, Mario's fiancée, and a famous singer, suspects Mario of a flirtation, and the suspicion is fostered by Scarpia, who is able to show her a fan dropped by Angelotti in his flight. In the second Act, Scarpia arrests the artist for complicity in Angelotti's escape, and Mario is being tortured in a room beside that in which Scarpia sees Tosca, for whom he has conceived a violent passion. In her mental distress Tosca tells the whereabouts of Angelotti, and the torture of Mario ceases. Scarpia now presses Tosca to yield her honour, and at the price of Mario's life she consents, but suddenly murders Scarpia with a carving-knife and escapes. After a scene between Tosca and her lover in the prison, Scarpia's treachery is revealed; for Mario, in spite of Scarpia's promise to order blank cartridge, is really shot, and the preconcerted plan by which he was to feign death and then escape comes to naught. Whereupon Tosca throws herself from the parapet into the Tiber.

The music shows the hand that wrote “*La Bohème*”; but, at the same time, as a critic pointed

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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out after the first London performance in July 1900, it is more closely akin to the work of Mascagni and Leoncavallo than the earlier and lighter opera. It has the same merits and the same defects. The chief merit is the sense of impulsive passionate life which it conveys; the chief defects are lack of strong, broad melody and of anything like development, and crudity in the obtaining of effects. The orchestration is clever, but thin in texture wherever it is not blaring and blatant. There is but little attempt at polyphony in the ordinary sense, though there are some big *ensembles* where several ideas are presented to us at once; but they go on independently rather than combine into a homogeneous whole. Such is the Finale of the first Act.

Another weakness of Puccini's music is a certain lack of aptness in musical characterisation, though the music accompanying the entrance of the old Sacristan is an exception proving the rule. The leading motives, which are employed freely, are not in any sense treated—simply repeated. But with all its faults there is much sincerity in the music, and such strength of utterance that it has the power of holding the hearer's attention and adds to the poignancy of the drama.

# MASCAGNI'S "CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA"

## THE COMPOSER

OF all the operatic composers who have risen to fame within recent years and whose works have been found worthy of performance by grand opera companies, Pietro Mascagni, if not the most gifted, is certainly the most noted. He is a native of Italy, having been born at Livorno in December 1863. His father was a baker with but slight pecuniary means, yet he sent his musically inclined son to the Milan Conservatoire, where he studied hard for the three years 1881-1884. Besides his acquirements there in theory and composition, he gained a practical knowledge of all the orchestral instruments, which has served him well as a conductor of opera.

When he left the Conservatoire, Mascagni found a post as assistant musical director of an operetta company. At Parma he conducted in public for the first time, the work being Lecocq's "Heart and Hand." The company visited many of the large and small towns of Italy, and finally, after many

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## F A V O U R I T E O P E R A S

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vicissitudes, went to pieces in an out-of-the-way place. It was disbanded, and Mascagni, for the want of even a copper, was stranded. Here I cannot resist quoting himself, premising that he was already at work on an opera by which he hoped to conquer the musical public :

But as there is a providence for drunkards, so there is one for players. I had made friends with good people who showed me much affection, and one friend among them, whom I made acquainted with the finished numbers of my opera, showed so much enthusiasm on hearing them that he volunteered to assist me with money to enable me to work. I had already finished the overture when at Ancona, and now at Ascoli, having nothing better to do, I worked hard at my opera, wrote the *Intermezzo* and then the whole of the fourth Act and instrumented it. My appetite was still very good, and I endeavoured to subdue the feeling by deep contemplation and meditation, calling up mysterious pictures, which seemed to arise from my opera score as do the two ghosts which are constantly before the hero of the drama. My music, however, failed to provide me the necessaries of life, and I determined to return to Ancona, having meanwhile written letter upon letter asking for employment. One morning a letter arrived with an invitation to come at once to Naples, and an enclosure of 100 lire. I was engaged for the company of the Duke Cirella. It only lasted a month, when as before the company disbanded and left me idle for six weeks. I lost no time; all my meals consisted of a plate of macaroni, and I worked diligently at the composition and instrumentation of my opera, which grew to a large heap of music sheets; this I enclosed carefully in a hand-bag. It would be the treasury-box of my future; this at least was my dream when taking long walks to Posilipo and Portici, chasing rainbows and seeing pictures of future greatness and fortune in the sparkling of the waves.



Turiddu, Santuzza, and Lola at the Church door





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## THE COMPOSER

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Mascagni then relates his renewed wanderings with Maresca's company, arriving on December 29, 1885, at Cerignola, to find there a home for several years. When the company started out for Sicily, our composer managed to get lost; and as soon as he found the coast clear he returned to Cerignola, where some kindly souls among the city authorities got him one or two pupils, and then he became director of an orchestra school. "I found time to work on my opera," he says, recalling those days, "and had it finished in less than two years and a half. Only a few scenes were lacking in 1888, but I then locked up the score. I had some premonition that it might be a necessity for me to become better known by a work of smaller dimensions. The idea to write 'Cavalleria Rusticana' had possession of me for many years previously."

The young composer gives a description of his despair and of his efforts to find a "text," when finally his friend Targioni, in Leghorn, promised him one. When the mail brought him the first chorus of the libretto he was in great joy, and said to his wife: "We must indulge in some expense to-day." "And what shall it be?" she asked. "An alarm clock." "And what for?" "So I may get up to-morrow before sunrise to begin with the 'Cavalleria.'" This extra expense, he goes on to say frankly, "meant great alterations in our monthly budget, but it was granted me without

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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difficulty. We went together to the clockmaker, and, after much bargaining, we bought a clock for 9 lire. I wound it up before retiring; but it was not destined to be of any use, as during the night—it was on February 3, 1889—at punctually 3 o'clock, my sweet little angel Mimi was born, the first of the series. I did not fail to fulfil the promise I had made to myself, and began to write the first chorus of the 'Cavalleria' at dawn." Mascagni then describes his past with its fears and hopes, its despair and its reliance, ending with the first representation of "Cavalleria" at the Constanza Theatre, Rome, in May 1890.

Twenty years ago every diligent newspaper reader knew the history of "Cavalleria Rusticana": how it was submitted to a musical friend, who promptly pronounced it "rubbish"; how Mascagni despondently entered it in the competition for the prize of 2000 francs offered by Sonzogno, the famous music-publisher of Milan, for the best one-act opera; how the composer accepted the prize as a windfall beyond the wildest hopes of a man who, with wife and two children, was existing on half-a-crown a day.

The subsequent *furore* in Rome was a revelation. In answer to a telegram, Mascagni hurried to the capital in his usual *négligé*—in fact his only dress—the clumsy handiwork of a village tailor. Apparently a simple, countrified young fellow, he appeared on the stage before that immense and enthusiastic audi-

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## THE COMPOSER

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ence, which cheered him all the more that he was awkward, bewildered, even stupefied at the reception. The transition was too great, and he felt his brain reel. Sympathising, admiring faces crowded about him. But something of his everyday life, something more restful, he must have, and that speedily. Rushing to his rooms after the performance, he telegraphed for his wife, and also despatched an incoherent letter, imploring her to pick up the children, and come to him without delay. She came — a plain, quiet person, who, during those tedious years of seclusion and hardship, had deteriorated in appearance, and had lost the worldly veneering of her younger days, but nevertheless a true helpmate for an agitated, fame-stricken man. That night she sat in a private box, listening to the entrancing strains, to the enthusiastic plaudits of the audience, weeping tears of joy throughout the performance. Her husband's time had come at last.

There is very little to say about Mascagni's later history. Speaking a good many years ago of his career, the composer remarked that there lay much hard work and many troubles behind him. "Success," he continued, "came upon me like a wild storm that took my breath away. I was afraid it would pass unless I went on working hard." He went on working hard. But his other operas have not won any lasting success. "L'Amico Fritz" is

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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too gentle a subject for his robust style; "Ratcliff," "I Rantzau," "Iris," and "Silvano" are hardly known outside Italy. In short Mascagni is, so far, as much the one-opera composer of "Cavalleria" as Bizet is the one-opera composer of "Carmen." That is his one grand success. Its "brutal magnetic measures" fascinated the public from the first; and then, as a critic with a leaning towards slang once put it, "the story is a stunner, necessitating several strong characters." Here is a work dealing with the strongest and fiercest passions—a terrible tragedy, rushing swiftly and inevitably to its close.

Mascagni is in temperament, disposition, and character earnest, active, benevolent, sincere, and reliable. Pronounced success in life, artistically and materially, does not appear to have changed his nature appreciably, for he manifests the same frank, ingenuous traits of character now that he did in his boyhood. He composes, we are told, with remarkable facility, and the spontaneity of his inspiration is such that he is rarely at a loss for appropriate musical ideas. When he gets a new libretto, he is content at first to read it daily, studying the detail and "living over" the incidents. He does not necessarily begin at the beginning, but chooses a scene anywhere that attracts him, and reads it till the words turn into music. Then he "sits down to the piano and the notes come pell-mell."

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## “CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA”

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### “CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA”

Turiddu, a handsome young peasant, is in love with Lola, a fair village maiden, who returns his affection. He enlists as a soldier, and on his return from the war discovers that his betrothed has proved faithless and married Alfio, a carrier. To drown his grief, he seeks another love, and his choice falls on Santuzza, who becomes passionately attached to him. But the fickle Lola very soon tires of Alfio, and, chagrined at the happiness of her former lover with his new sweetheart, she is mad with jealousy and endeavours to win him back to her side. This she has already succeeded in doing when the play begins.

The orchestral introduction is interrupted by a Siciliana, sung by Turiddu behind the scenes, in which he extols Lola's beauty and protests his undying devotion. The curtain rises on the Square of a Sicilian village. At the back, on the right, there is a church; on the left, an inn and the cottage of old Lucia, the mother of Turiddu. It is Easter Day. The church-bells are ringing, and a crowd of peasants, men, women, and children, come on leisurely, cross the stage, and pass into the church. A chorus in praise of Spring and the reawakening of nature is heard from behind. Then the women appear, still singing; they are joined by the men,

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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and all slowly wend their way home, the strains dying in the distance.

When the stage is once more cleared, Santuzza enters. Going towards the cottage she asks Lucia, who comes out at the same moment, what has become of Turiddu. His mother replies that he has gone for wine to Francofonte. Santuzza, however, declares he was seen in the village last night, and hints that she suspects his whereabouts. Lucia invites Santuzza to go into the church, but she refuses. "I dare not enter," she says—"I who am accursed. My heart is broken."

Now the cracking of a whip and the sound of bells are heard from without; and Alfio, accompanied by a number of peasants, appears, singing a merry song of the road, to which the men, soon joined by the women, supply a chorus. He is perfectly happy, entirely free from care; driving his team, and believing in his wife, tender and true, who keeps watch at home. When the crowd disperses in various directions, and he is left alone with Lucia and Santuzza, Lucia tells him he is right to be always so gay. In answer to his request for some old wine of hers, which he likes, she says it is finished, but that Turiddu has gone for more. Alfio knows better. "'Twas only this morn I saw him beside my cottage lurking." When Lucia expresses surprise, Santuzza quickly tells her to be silent. Just then the organ sounds from the church, and Alfio, bidding

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## “CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA”

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them go to mass without him, leaves them abruptly. The Easter music is now heard within ; soon men and women enter, kneel in front of the church, and also join in singing. Finally Santuzza and Lucia add their voices to the hymn of thanksgiving, at the close of which, all, save these two, proceed into the sacred edifice.

Lucia, who remembers Santuzza's warning to be silent, would fain know its meaning, and thus calls forth the beautiful Romance, in which is revealed the whole story of love and jealousy, the certainty that Lola has regained her power over Turiddu, and the despair of Santuzza. Lucia passes into the church promising to pray for the broken-hearted girl, just as Turiddu appears on the scene. When he demands of his old love why she has not gone to mass, she replies that she cannot, and entreats him to listen to her. To her question, "Where hast thou come from?" he insists "from Francofonte"; and on her asserting that he has been seen stealing from Lola's cottage that morning and that Alfio knows of it, he charges her with spying on him and wishing to kill him. He persists in denying his love for Lola, and has nothing but scorn for the poor girl whose passionate pleading has no effect upon his heart. He ends by telling her plainly that he loves her no more. At that moment Lola is heard singing behind the scenes :

Oh, gentle flower of love !  
Close to my beating heart I hold thee, dreaming,  
Heaven has no flower above so sweetly gleaming !

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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Oh, gentle flower of love !  
Heaven has a thousand stars of gold above me,  
I ask but one in all the world to love me !  
Oh, gentle flower of love !

She enters, and seeing the pair, breaks off, asking Turiddu, "Where is Alfio?" Then, pointing to the church, she inquires of her rival, "Why go you not yonder?" Santuzza makes answer, "They only pray whose hearts are free from sin and stainless"; to which Lola retorts, "Then, thanks be to Heaven, Heaven will watch over me"; and ironically blessing Turiddu and Santuzza, she, too, joins the worshippers. Turiddu, enraged, rushes on Santuzza, and then casts her from him. She pleads once more to be taken back to his heart, but in vain. At last he dashes her to the ground, and follows Lola into the church. Now Santuzza's love seems to be turned to hate. She curses the traitor, and when Alfio appears, she seizes the chance of revenge, telling him that his wife is false. When, however, she realises that Alfio means to fight and kill Turiddu, she bitterly regrets having betrayed him; for, in spite of his faithlessness, she still loves him. "Ah, wretched I!" she cries, while Alfio demands "Revenge, revenge!" And thus ends the first part of the work. After its storm and stress depicting the conflict of human passions, the world-famed "Intermezzo" comes like a breath of fresh air to cool the atmosphere.





Santuzza tells Alfio of his wife's falseness



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## “CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA”

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The second part of the stirring drama begins with a short orchestral prelude, during which Lucia enters and crosses the stage to her cottage. A number of peasants follow, singing on their homeward way after the Easter celebrations. At the close of their “merry lay,” they are joined by Lola and Turiddu from the church. Lola is also going home, but Turiddu begs her to stay. At the same time, turning to the crowd, he invites them to drink with him to-day. They accept and come to the table for the wine, while Turiddu sings a rousing drinking song, in which presently the whole company lustily join. They have just uttered the last words, “Drink on, drink on,” when Alfio enters and salutes them. Turiddu at once fills a cup and hands it to him. “Thank you,” says Alfio, “the wine you give, I cannot drink it. There is poison within it”; to which Turiddu replies, “’Tis as you please,” throwing away the wine. Lola is terror-struck, and now feeling that there is trouble brewing she exclaims in anguish, “Ah, God! what woe is nigh!” At this point some of the women in the crowd consult together, then go to Lola, and saying, “Come, Mistress Lola, this is no place for you,” they lead her away.

When she is gone, Turiddu declares himself, “At your service, Alfio.” The two men embrace, and Turiddu bites Alfio’s right ear, as a challenge. “Master Turiddu,” replies Alfio, “I will accept your

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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challenge; we understand each other!" After a long pause, during which Turiddu is seized with terrible remorse, he addresses Alfio in accents of sorrow and repentance: "I know that I have wronged thee; blame not thy Lola. By heaven above thee, I swear the fault was mine alone! But if you kill me, who will care for Santa; lonely and deserted, who will protect her?" In a moment, changing his tone again, he shouts with violence, "Come, then, let's try whose knife is longest," and Alfio goes off to await him in the garden.

Turiddu, now calling his mother from her cottage, begs her to bless him, and prays that, if he return not, she will be a mother to his Santa. Lucia, in distress, wishes him to explain, but with assumed indifference, he says he has only been dreaming; she need have no fear. He kisses her farewell, and beseeching her to pray for him, rushes out. By this time his mother realises that he is in great trouble, and running to the back of the stage she calls after him despairingly. Presently Santuzza appears, and crying, "Dearest mother," embraces the distracted woman, while the stage fills with people with fear and agitation on their faces. Confused tongues are heard without, and then a woman's voice in the distance shouting, "Turiddu is killed!" The awful truth is repeated, and Santuzza and Lucia fall senseless to the ground.

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## THE MUSIC

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### THE MUSIC<sup>1</sup>

“Cavalleria” has had much adverse criticism as well as generous appreciation; as to its success there can be only one opinion. Since its first performance in 1890 it has been given all over the world, and has never failed anywhere. Still a favourite with the music-loving public, it is likely for many a day to come to retain its position in the operatic repertoire.

There are several qualities necessary for the writing of grand opera, but the two most essential are the gift of melody and the dramatic sense. Both of these Mascagni has in abundance. In “Cavalleria” the melody is not always original, it is occasionally reminiscent of other composers; but there is quite enough true inspiration to show that the composer need borrow from no one, while dramatic force and power of declamation are prominent features of the work.

The orchestral prelude at once sounds the note of tragedy, preparing the listener for the stormy drama to follow. It begins with a solemn melody, used later as accompaniment when Santuzza begs Lucia to pray for her. Then two striking themes

<sup>1</sup> The music quotations from both “Cavalleria” and “Pagliacci” are given by kind permission of Messrs. Ascherberg, Hopwood & Crew, Ltd.

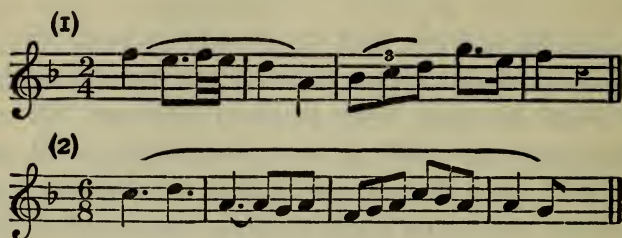
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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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from the duet between Santuzza and Turiddu are introduced, which may be called the motives of entreaty :



At that part of the first theme where, in the duet, Santuzza beseeches him most passionately to take her back to his heart, the orchestra is suddenly silent and the charming and characteristic Siciliana is sung behind the curtain to a harp accompaniment. This is Turiddu's answer to Santuzza's pleading. It dies away *pianissimo*, and once more the orchestra blazes forth in continuation of the phrase interrupted by the love song. After a connecting figure, the second theme from the duet is given out; and finally the repetition of the first brings the introduction to a close.

The opening chorus, with its piquant waltz rhythm and fresh, spring-like melody, is brimful of life and sunlight, suggesting the resurrection of nature and the consequent joy and gratitude of man. In marked contrast to this number is the *largo* passage for the orchestra, which foreshadows Santuzza's entrance. Its first phrase must be specially noted—

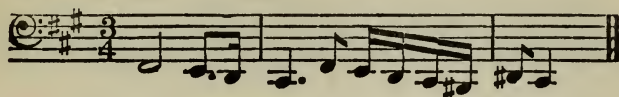
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## THE MUSIC

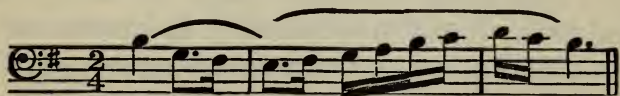
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the motive of her despair—for we shall hear it again and again :



Now Santuzza appears, and Mascagni's gift of declamation is at once apparent in her opening phrases, in which she is musically characterised. At the end of the scena the despair motive is again introduced in the orchestra, when she declares herself accursed. Alfio's song which follows is bright and lively, in keeping with the joyous, happy-go-lucky nature of the carrier.

The prayer, though not markedly original and not particularly "churchy" in feeling, is a telling piece of writing, and its stage effect is impressive, though somewhat artificial. At its conclusion the tragic element once more reasserts itself in the very fine Romance in which Santuzza tells Lucia the sad story of unfaithful love. It is direct and simple in style and full of character. The insistent theme in the bass is typical of her jealousy and of Lola's treachery :



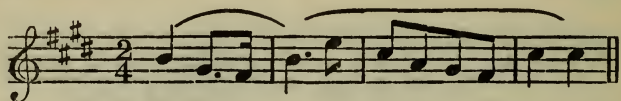
It is heard several times in the orchestra during the recital, and again later in the work. The phrase in

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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E major is descriptive of Santuzza's absorbing love for Turiddu :



At the end of the narrative the music assumes a gentle, tender character, when the distracted girl begs Lucia to pray for her; while at the same time the opening theme of the prelude is heard in the orchestra.

The duet for Santuzza and Turiddu contains, besides the two motives given out in the prelude, another arresting melody sung first by Turiddu and then taken up by Santa. Towards the close of the duet Santa's love-theme is heard *pianissimo* in the orchestra accompanying her entreaties. The light, dainty Stornello (a sort of improvised Italian folk-song), in waltz rhythm, sung by Lola behind the scenes, enhances the grim despair of this number, throughout which the composer shows a wonderful power of musical characterisation. Lola, the heartless flirt; Santa, the deserted; and Turiddu, the fickle—all are described in the music allotted to them. From the dramatic point of view it is a strong scene of passionate realism, and the music has certainly played its part in heightening the emotional effect.

As Turiddu rushes into the church and Santa curses him, the despair motive is heard in the



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## THE MUSIC

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orchestra *fortissimo*; then gradually the tension relaxes, the music softens to *pianissimo*, and a few bars reminiscent of Alfio's song of the road herald the entrance of the carrier. When Santa tells Alfio that his wife is false, the theme in the bass typical of her jealousy and of Lola's treachery rises from the orchestra again and again. A short, marked phrase associated with Alfio's revenge, and a plaintive wailing theme suggestive of his despair are also heard repeatedly. At the close of the number a striking effect is produced by a whirling chromatic passage in unison, apparently indicating the impending catastrophe.

The conception of the *Intermezzo* was a happy thought. Mascagni wished to show that, while the quartet of Sicilian peasants were living at white heat, so to speak, the great world outside was rolling on just as usual, quietly and serenely, all unconscious of this struggle to the death of human passions. He intended to create the feeling of largeness and peaceful repose, which should come as a relief after a scene of concentrated love, hatred, and revenge. And he has succeeded.

The opening, a phrase from the prayer, is adequately conceived, but unfortunately in the second part the means Mascagni has thought fit to use scarcely recommend themselves to a musician. The melody is cheap, and so is the combination of instruments. Probably no one could have made much

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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more out of a passage for the violins in unison, with a harp and organ accompaniment. This movement is not on the same level as the rest of the opera, and it is indeed curious that the weakest part should have become the most popular number. In spite, however, of its barrel-organ fame, and in spite of what musicians may think of its banal character, the *Intermezzo* still has the effect desired by the composer. Thus has he fulfilled his intention.

In the beginning of the second part the music which accompanied the peasants on their way to church is once more heard, and as they turn their steps homeward they are again singing of Easter. The "Brindisi," or drinking song, with its stirring chorus, has the requisite verve, and though somewhat reminiscent of other songs of the same class, serves its purpose well. Then with the entrance of Alfio and on to the end the audience is once more at high tension.

Turiddu's farewell to his mother is full of tenderness. Particularly beautiful is the broad phrase in which he commends Santa to her care, and entreats her to pray for him. When he has gone, an agitated figure in the bass, beginning *piano* and increasing to *fortissimo*, seems to indicate the terror-stricken condition of his wretched mother. With the entrance of Santuzza, her love motive is thundered forth from the orchestra, merging into a phrase from the prayer, and culminating in a crash *ffff*. A roll of the drums

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## THE MUSIC

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is then heard *ppp*, with a weird chord for the brass—"Turiddu is killed!" When both women faint away, the theme of despair rises solemnly for the last time, and as the curtain falls tranquilly the tragedy ends with a rushing chromatic passage in unison.

In his treatment of the orchestra Mascagni does not show any special originality, but he has a fine idea of light and shade, though his contrasts are now and again too violent. Sometimes he is noisy—more so than the occasion would seem to demand—at other times lacking in fulness; but on the whole his scoring is musicianly, highly coloured, and dramatically effective.

# LEONCAVALLO'S "I PAGLIACCI"

## THE COMPOSER

RUGGIERO LEONCAVALLO was born at Naples in March 1858, so that he was thirty-four when "Pagliacci" was produced in 1892. He is the son of Judge-President Leoncavallo and Virginia Dauria, daughter of a famous Neapolitan painter. He studied at the Naples Conservatoire, and at sixteen started on a tour as a pianist. At Bologna he heard "Tannhäuser," the first of Wagner's works he ever knew. "This new art," he says, "made a deep impression on me, and I began to study it ardently."

Subsequently, at Bologna, he made the personal acquaintance of Wagner, who was there for the production of "Rienzi." Wagner encouraged him to persevere, bidding him not be alarmed at the difficulties he would have to face. While talking, Wagner pulled off his famous cap, seized between his fingers a lock of his white hair, and said, "Voyez, je lutte encore." This conversation, Leoncavallo adds, "was very beneficial to me, and during all the bitterness of my subsequent struggles I had always before my eyes the figure of the patriarch, with his 'Voyez, je lutte encore.'"

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## THE COMPOSER

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Leoncavallo, an interviewer once told, has on his writing-table a framed portrait of Wagner, to which he would point, saying: "Voilà mon Wagner, qui me quitte jamais." He is also proud of a bust of Massenet, presented by the composer, and inscribed, "À mon confrère, à mon ami, Leoncavallo."

The historical researches for a contemplated tetralogy embodying the Italian Renaissance (this was in imitation of Wagner's "Ring") occupied Leoncavallo for six years. Then he travelled "all over the world," as he says, to earn his living as a concert pianist. He visited Egypt, Turkey, Greece, Germany, Belgium, and Holland, and finally settled for several years in Paris. It is often said that he began his musical career as a pianist in Egypt, and the statement is almost literally true. His uncle, Leoncavallo Bey, was at that time director of the Press Bureau at the Egyptian Foreign Office. Ruggiero played at Court, and was appointed "Musician in Ordinary" to the brother of the Viceroy, Tewfik Mahmud. His ability, and the influence behind him, caused Arabi Pasha to promise him the post of Chief of the Egyptian military bands, at a handsome salary. His future, therefore, seemed assured. But, alas! the British redcoats interfered with Arabi's plans, and Leoncavallo himself tells the story of how he saved his life after the battle of Tel-el-Kebir by a twenty-four hours' ride on horseback to Ismailia, disguised as an Arab.

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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By 1888 Leoncavallo had completed the text of his opera, the "Medici"; for, as has already been noted, he follows the example of Wagner in writing his own libretto. "I find it quite impossible," he says, "to set to music somebody else's words. I do not understand how any really artistic work can be created in that way. With me words and notes are simultaneous; at least, while I am writing the text, the scaffolding, the framework of the music is going up. The phrasing, the elaboration come afterward." Well, having finished the "Medici," Leoncavallo went off to Milan to communicate the fact to the publisher Ricordi. The idea pleased Ricordi, and he made a contract with the composer according to which he was to write the music on his (Ricordi's) account. A year later the opera was finished, but Ricordi refused to publish it.

After a delay of over three years, Leoncavallo wrote the libretto and music of "Pagliacci," and offered the opera to Sonzogno, who, as we have seen, had been the direct means of giving "Cavalleria Rusticana" to the world. The work was produced for the first time at Milan in May 1892. Its success then was most striking, and, as Leoncavallo once remarked, "The work has gone on like a train of powder." At that time somebody asked the composer whether the libretto was based on a real event. He replied that the idea was suggested by a trial that took place at Cosenza before his father,

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## THE COMPOSER

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judge of the court there, in which a strolling player, jealous of his wife, was charged with murdering her after a stage performance. The prisoner was a figure of tragic power as he stood before the judge, unblenching, as if petrified with grief. "Even now," continued the composer, "I can hear his rough voice echoing through the court as he cried, 'Non mi pento del delitto. Tutt altro! Se dovessi ricominciare, ricomincerei.'" While Ricordi was still delaying about the "Medici," the success of Mascagni with "Cavalleria" gave Leoncavallo the idea of writing a short dramatic work, and at once the awful figure of the mountebank murderer rose up in his mind. He worked with feverish haste, and completed text and music in five months.

Such is the history of "I Pagliacci." There is not much to say further about the composer himself. He lives quietly, and lets the great roaring world go on for the most part unheeded. He says that when a musical inspiration comes to him he never writes it down at once. He keeps it in his memory, which is remarkably good. "When I need the idea, I can find it immediately. I have a horror of re-writing or deleting; the parts of my composition are carried in my head till I can write them down, even to the last note. Then I do not alter a jot."

“I PAGLIACCI”

The opera begins with a Prologue sung by Tonio in front of the curtain. The author, Tonio tells, loves the custom of a prologue, and has sent him to explain that the subject of his work is a chapter out of the book of life—a true story. The actor, though clad in motley and tinsel, is a man with a heart like his auditor; a man with the same passions, the same capacity for gladness and sorrow, the same broad heaven above him and the same wide lonely world before him. Then he gives the sign to raise the curtain.

ACT 1.—The characters in the story are a troupe of strolling players, called Pagliacci, such as are often seen in Italian villages. They tour the country, going from fair to fair, playing in any available theatre the story of Columbine, Harlequin, and Punchinello, to an audience of admiring peasants. The Act begins with the arrival of one of these troupes in a village in Calabria at the time of the Feast of the Virgin di Mezzagosto. The scene is the entrance of the village, where two roads meet. On the right is a rustic theatre. As the curtain rises, sounds of a drum and of a trumpet out of tune are heard. Laughing, shouting, whistling voices are approaching. Villagers enter in holiday



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## "I PAGLIACCI"

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attire. Tonio looks up the road on the left, then, worried by the staring crowd, lies down in front of the theatre. It is a bright sunny day, and the time is three o'clock.

While the peasants sing a chorus of welcome to the players the troupe come on. Canio, the chief actor, invites the crowd to attend the performance at seven the same evening. Tonio advances to help Nedda down from the cart, but Canio, who has already alighted, boxes his ears, and, taking Nedda in his arms, lifts her out himself. Beppe drags away the donkey cart, and Tonio, chaffed by the boys, retires grumbling behind the theatre. Some of the villagers then ask Canio to drink with them at the tavern. Beppe reappears and agrees to join the party, but when Canio invites Tonio he replies that he has "to clean the donkey"; he will follow later. A peasant in jest bids Canio beware lest Tonio make love to his wife during his absence. Thereupon Canio declares solemnly that such a game is hardly worth the playing, for the stage and life are not the same. If in a play he caught Nedda with a lover, he would get into a passion, and then probably allow the lover to beat him while the people applauded. But if his wife should deceive him in earnest the ending would be different. When the crowd exclaim, "But surely you don't suspect her!" he answers, "No, of course not; I love and respect her!" and going up to Nedda, he kisses her, and then disappears.

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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Now more villagers enter with pipers. After the Bell Chorus, they all go off to vespers, leaving Nedda alone. At first she is afraid that Canio suspects her of having a lover; soon, however, she dismisses the idea, and revels in the glorious sunshine, the beauties of nature, and the song of the birds, which seem to respond to the pulsing of her restless heart. Finishing her song, she discovers that Tonio has been listening. He seizes the opportunity of declaring his passion, and when she laughs at him, and finally strikes him in the face with a whip as he is trying to kiss her, he vows he will have his revenge, and goes off. Presently Nedda's lover, Silvio, steals in and entreats her to fly with him. She refuses, and bids him not to tempt her. He continues, nevertheless, to plead his cause, and so eloquently that at last she gives way, and promises to go to him that night for ever.

Tonio, who has been spying on her, and has gone away to inform her husband of her treachery, returns with Canio just as the lovers are saying farewell. Canio, furious with jealousy, rushes after Silvio, but is too late to catch him. Returning to Nedda he demands the traitor's name. She absolutely refuses to divulge it, though he draws a dagger from his belt and is about to kill her. At this point Beppe, running in, snatches the knife from him. At Beppe's call, Tonio comes to help him to calm their master. Beppe then takes Nedda into the



Nedda and her lover



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## "I PAGLIACCI"

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theatre, while Tonio comforts Canio with the assurance that the gallant will return—perhaps come to the play to-night. Beppe once more appears, and, bidding Canio get ready for the performance, goes away with Tonio. Alone, Canio cries out in despair. How can he act a comedy, with tragedy in his heart! Then with bitter cynicism he addresses himself:

Thou art not a man, thou'rt but a jester!  
On with the motley, and the paint, and the powder!  
The people pay thee, and want their laugh, you know!  
If Harlequin thy Columbine has stolen, laugh Punchinello!  
The world will cry, "Bravo!"

At last, sobbing as if his heart would break, he moves slowly towards the theatre, pushes the curtain roughly as if not wishing to enter, and burying his face in his hands, pauses for a moment to recover himself; then, with a sudden rush, disappears behind the curtains.

ACT 2.—It is the evening of the same day. Beppe comes from behind blowing a trumpet; Tonio, following with the big drum, takes up his position on the left of the theatre. People come from all directions to the play, and Beppe arranges the benches for the women, who quarrel about their seats. Meantime the peasants sing a chorus descriptive of their rush for places, and their impatience for the actors to begin. Nedda goes round with a plate to collect the money, and Silvio, who is among

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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the audience, manages to remind her quietly of to-night's rendezvous. At last the curtain is drawn aside, and the play within a play begins.

The scene represents a little room, with two side doors, a window at the back, and a table and two chairs on the right. By a strange coincidence the play happens to be a burlesque of all that has taken place in the first Act.

Columbine (Nedda) is seated near the table; rising, she walks about restlessly, as if expecting some one. Punchinello (Canio), her husband, she tells, will not be home till morning, while Taddeo (Tonio), the servant, is at market. Hearing the sound of a guitar off the stage, she rushes to the window with a cry of joy. Harlequin, behind, serenades her. Then Taddeo peeps through the door and watches Columbine, meanwhile singing a trill and roulade in mock tragic style, at which the peasants laugh. He thinks his opportunity has come to confess to his mistress that he adores her, so he makes her aware of his presence by a long and exaggerated sigh. In the middle of his declaration, Harlequin, at a signal from Columbine, jumps in through the window, puts a bottle down, and taking Taddeo by the ear, just when he says, "Must I forsake thee?" answers, "Yes, or I'll make thee." "What," exclaims Taddeo, "you love her? Then I must hand her over!" He goes out blessing the pair and promising to watch over them. Columbine

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## " I P A G L I A C C I "

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now sets the table for supper, Harlequin adding the bottle of wine he has brought with him, and they sit down to enjoy themselves. Presently Harlequin takes out a little phial he has had concealed about him, and giving it to Columbine, asks her to put its contents in her husband's wine, and fly with him. Taddeo at this point warns the pair that the husband is near, that he has discovered all, and is stamping with rage. He at once goes off by the door on the left; and as Harlequin is escaping by the window, he reminds Columbine of the philtre, while she bids him good-night in the exact same words she had used to Silvio, "To-night, love, and for ever, I shall be thine!"

Punchinello (Canio) enters in time to hear the last words, and exclaiming aside, "God, am I dreaming? What she said this morning!" he advances to play his part. He asks Columbine who has been with her. When she replies, "No one but Taddeo," and brings the old servant out of his hiding-place to testify to her fidelity, he still insists that she has a lover and must reveal his name. Nedda makes light of the matter, and calls out "Punchinello! Punchinello!" in a jocular manner. But he is not to be put off. He declares that he is no longer Punchinello; he is a man again, with a heart crying for vengeance. Recalling the love he once bore his wife and his trust in her honour, Canio falls on the chair by the table overwhelmed with emotion, saying,

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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“What have I now but a heart that is broken?” The audience are delighted with his wonderful acting, and when he continues in the same passionate strain, finally telling his wife, “Thou hadst my love, but now thou hast my hate and scorn!” they shout “Bravo!” with enthusiasm.

By this time Nedda has begun to be afraid of her husband. She tries to resume the play with a forced smile. This only increases Canio’s rage, and when he once more demands her lover’s name and she again refuses, he becomes so excited that the peasants wonder if he is in earnest, and call out to that effect. Nedda continues to defy him, and, though he threatens to kill her, she will not give up her secret. At last, frantic with jealous rage, he rushes at her and stabs her to the heart. With her dying breath she calls to Silvio for help. Now Canio knows his betrayer, and as Silvio runs towards the stage he, too, receives his death-blow from the same hands. The spectators cry out in terror, “Stop him! arrest him!” Then Canio, in a state of collapse, lets his knife fall, and gasps out—“The comedy is ended!”

## THE MUSIC

### PROLOGUE

The orchestral prelude opens with a short, lively phrase denoting the Pagliacci, or troupe of players.



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## THE MUSIC

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Suddenly a slow, wailing theme (1) is heard, typical of Canio's despair. This is followed by a suave, caressing melody (2) representing the love of Silvio and Nedda, which in turn gives way to the grim, mysterious motive (3) associated with Canio's revenge:

(1)

(2)

(3)

Then the Pagliacci theme is resumed, and presently Tonio appears, to sing the beautiful prologue. When he refers to the life of the actor he is accompanied by the Pagliacci theme; when he tells of the drama to follow, the motives of love, and revenge, and despair rise from the orchestra; when he asks the audience to look on the players as men with hearts and passions like themselves, he sings a fine broad melody, with a flowing accompaniment to which the harp lends additional charm. Then this striking and original introduction is brought to a close as he cries, "Ring up the curtain."

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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ACT 1.—The first chorus, with its trumpet calls, its strings *tremolo*, its shrieking wood-wind effects, its blaring brass, and its general bustle, are full of colour, and highly descriptive of the arrival and reception of the troupe. After this noisy scene the music changes to a tripping measure, as Canio invites the crowd to the evening performance. This is interrupted by the suggestion that Tonio stays behind to flirt with Nedda, when Canio sings in a strain of simple, doleful melody, which seems to indicate his presentiment of the impending catastrophe. When he speaks of finding Nedda with a lover on the stage, the accompanying figure is the same as that used in the play, in the last Act; but when he mentions the possibility of Nedda deceiving him in real life, we hear in the orchestra the revenge theme which we have already noted in the prologue. The lively rhythm is then resumed, the bagpipes are heard in the distance, and soon the pipers enter. The Bell Chorus, with its drone-like accompaniment, in which the men imitate the bell and the sopranos the bagpipes, is particularly fine. It gives us at once the Italian village atmosphere. After a striking and harmonically original cadence, the music gradually dies away as the peasants disappear, and the pipe-like strains grow fainter and fainter. The musical atmosphere changes when Nedda, left alone, wonders if Canio suspects her, the motives of revenge and love accompanying her recitative.

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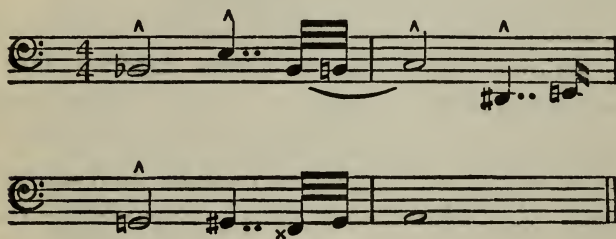
## THE MUSIC

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The well-known Ballatella is remarkable for its striking and piquant orchestration, in which the harp and muted strings are used with charming effect. With its freshness and brightness it suggests the open air, and, though trying to the artist, it is a very grateful number.

The melody in which Tonio makes love is reminiscent of his utterances in the prologue, while Nedda's answer is accompanied by a delicate figure for the strings which is used again in the play in the last Act. When she strikes him, a sinister theme in the bass, heard for the first time, and boldly announced by the trombones with the strings *tremolo*, indicates Tonio's revenge:



Then Silvio's appearance is intimated by a snatch of the love-motive, which is a leading feature in the accompaniment of the scene that follows.

This long duet for the lovers is one of the finest numbers in the opera; noteworthy for its flow of passionate melody, to which the by-play of Tonio, with its vengeance-motive, offers an effective foil.

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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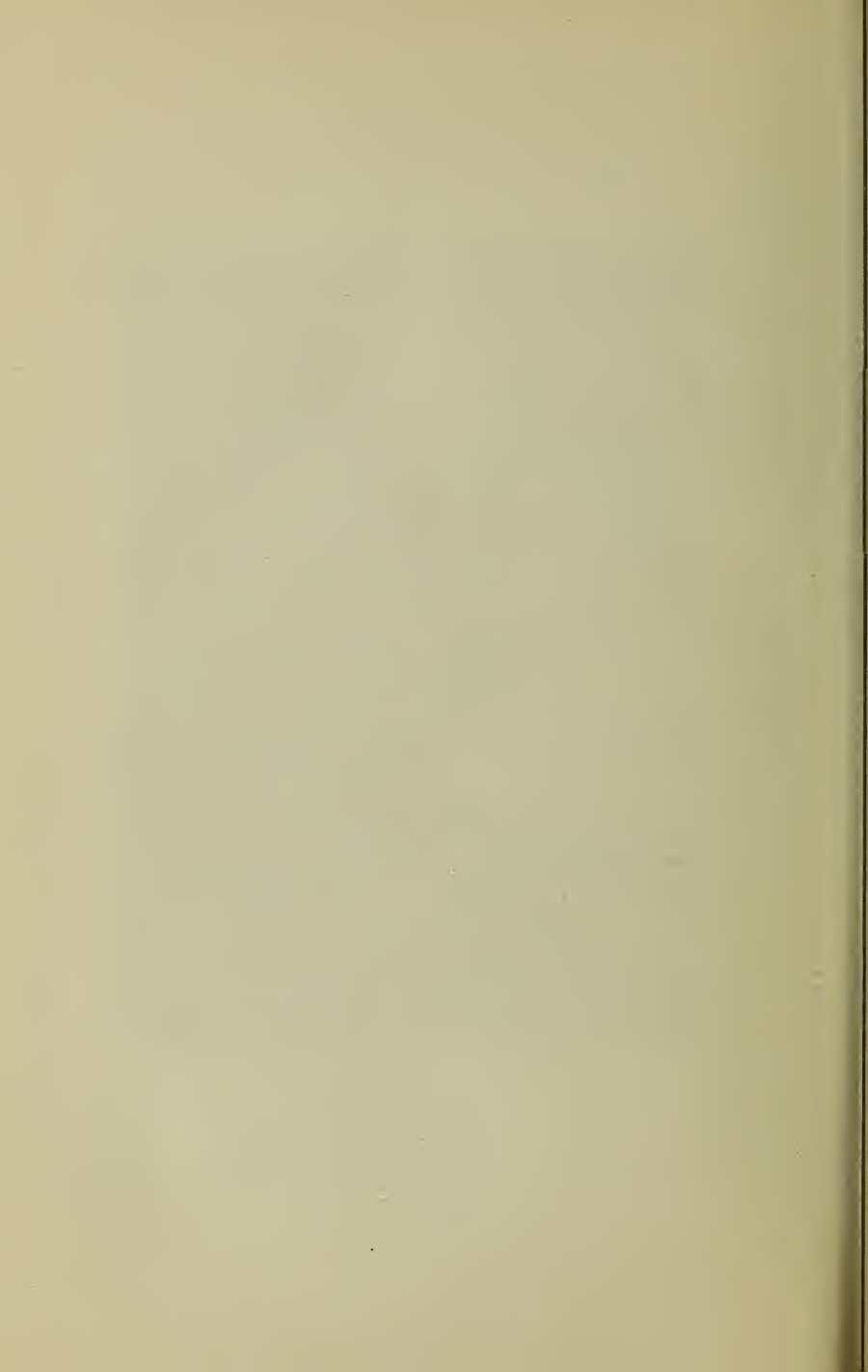
The love-theme is worked up, rising higher and higher; and then a broad phrase for Nedda, repeated in imitation by Silvio, culminates in a fine burst of passion for both, followed by a soft, tender cadence as Nedda gives way to his entreaty. When Tonio and Canio appear at the back, witnessing the farewell of the lovers, the motive of Tonio's revenge is given out *pianissimo* by the basses in unison, unaccompanied, in all its naked grimness. When Canio rushes after Silvio, the orchestra works up *agitato*, this theme being very prominent. The theme also plays an important part, along with Canio's revenge-motive, in the accompaniment of the rest of this scene, in which declamatory and tragic force are conspicuous features.

Canio's solo is one of the gems of the opera. His jealous rage, his rebellion against fate, his despair at having to act the clown when death is in his soul, are all graphically depicted in this fine melody, which, in its pathos, rises to such a dramatic height. As Canio moves slowly towards the theatre the despair-motive is heard in the orchestra, and now in the major key—a truly dramatic touch. Thus the first Act is brought to an effective close, leaving the listener with a sad feeling of utter hopelessness.

INTERMEZZO.—The principal feature of this movement is the theme first sung by Tonio in the prologue. Although the "Pagliacci" *intermezzo* has not achieved the same fame as that by the com-



Columbine and Harlequin at supper



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## THE MUSIC

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poser's fellow-countryman, it serves a somewhat similar purpose, in affording relief to this stirring drama of strong passions, while musically perhaps it is more deserving of appreciation.

ACT 2.—The second Act, like the first, begins with trumpet calls and general bustle, as the villagers assemble for the play. Much of the music of the opening chorus is repeated, and the same atmosphere prevails.

The play opens with a minuet of quite old-world flavour, during which the Columbine lets it be understood that in her husband's absence she is awaiting her lover, the Harlequin. The serenade which he sings outside her window, with its *pizzicato* accompaniment, is quite in the old Italian troubadour style, and the gavotte heard later on might have been written by Mozart. Indeed we should specially mark here the wonderful contrast between this play within a play and the real tragedy underlying it, as illustrating what Canio sings in the first Act: "The stage and life are different, you'll discover!"

Taddeo's mock-heroics and vocal roulades afford a little touch of humorous relief. The tripping figure for strings which accompanied Nedda's scorn of Tonio's love, when in the first Act she bade him keep his declaration till the evening, is now elaborated with charming effect. After they have sung the gavotte and sat down to supper, Taddeo comes to warn them that the husband is at hand, and then

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## F A V O U R I T E O P E R A S

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the music changes. The love melody is heard in the orchestra as Canio, the PUNCHINELLO, appears in time to catch COLUMBINE'S farewell to HARLEQUIN in the same words she had already used to SILVIO; while his outburst of despair is accompanied by the theme of revenge. NEDDA, however, continues to play her part of COLUMBINE in characteristic strains. Again we hear the revenge-motive as the actor merges in the man, and the action hurries to its inevitable end. For a moment he forgets his wrongs as he sings a passionate melody, recalling his trustful love for his wife. Immediately, however, the thirst for revenge is again uppermost, aggravated now by NEDDA'S efforts to sustain her part in the play to the old gavotte tune, while fear is in her heart.

Canio's rage at last overcomes him, and the storm in his breast is reflected in the music, which now becomes agitated in character. The general excitement is increased by the consternation of the audience, who begin to suspect that the players are not acting. Finally Canio, in desperation, tries to force from his wife the name of her lover, and when she firmly refuses to reveal it, he stabs her to the heart. As NEDDA falls she calls SILVIO, who rushes forward to meet his fate at the hands of the distracted husband. For the last time the revenge-theme rises solemnly from the orchestra, and the work is brought to a close with the plaintive, wailing



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## THE MUSIC

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melody associated with Canio's despair, which now blazes forth *fff* as the curtain falls.

The orchestration of "Pagliacci" is brilliant, and, if at times a trifle noisy, is as a rule picturesque and effective. It seldom fails to meet the dramatic requirements, while, generally speaking, good judgment and a strong sense of colour are shown throughout.

Like Mascagni, Leoncavallo possesses the main gifts essential to the writing of a successful opera. He has the feeling for melody, dramatic force, declamatory power, and musical characterisation. Like him, too, he has his faults. His music often recalls other composers, and his contrasts are occasionally exaggerated. On the other hand, his dramatic grip is greater, as well as his power of characterisation, while he has the obvious advantage of being his own librettist. He makes a more consistent use of the *leit-motive*, and allows nothing to interfere with the action of the drama, which never flags. The music of "Pagliacci" has by some been called theatrical, possibly because now and then it is apt to suffer from the composer's over-anxiety to accentuate the dramatic situation.

## SAINT-SAËNS' "SAMSON AND DELILAH"

THE history of this opera, which now keenly engages interest, is curious. The subject was taken up by M. Saint-Saëns before the Franco-Prussian war, and the score was completed in 1872. But there was no performance until 1877, and then at Weimar. Afterwards it was given in the German cities, including Hamburg. Not until 1890, at Rouen, was the work recognised in the composer's native country. After that it quickly ran through the musical centres of Europe. Since it was given at the Paris Opera in 1892, it has never been absent from the repertory. Up to 1906 it had been played no fewer than 227 times. Its popularity is none the less with the management by reason of its comparative shortness, which allows it to be used as a "curtain raiser" for a three-act ballet, a distinction it shares with "Rigoletto," "Freischütz," and even "La Favorita." In England it was heard twice in concert form before it was staged at Covent Garden in April 1909, the work having been vetoed because of the British prejudice that scriptural subjects are unfitted for stage representation.

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## “SAMSON AND DELILAH”

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“Samson and Delilah” is in three Acts, and the libretto has so faithfully followed the Bible story that there is no need to outline the text. The music of the first Act is in the solid and dignified style of the oratorio, suggestive of Handel and Bach; in the second Act the chief feature is the rich, passionate colouring; while in the third no one can fail to remark that Oriental flavour, displayed mainly in rhythm and interval, which is so characteristic of the composer. There are many lovely melodies in the work, and the orchestration is remarkably fine.

Charles Camille Saint-Saëns is one of the most distinguished of modern French composers. Wagner spoke of him as “the greatest living French composer,” and Gounod constantly expressed his admiration of his wonderful gifts, remarking that he could write at will a work in the style of Rossini, of Verdi, of Schumann, or of Wagner. He was born in 1835, and has had many successes in the double character of composer and player. He is an accomplished organist, and as a pianist was once thought to rival Liszt. They say that at Bayreuth, when Saint-Saëns was at the height of his Wagner enthusiasm, he sat one evening at the piano, in the presence of a large company of the world’s musical notables, and played from the orchestral score one of the Acts of “Parsifal,” and also from the score of the “Nibelungen.” The former work was then unknown, and his arranging and reading were at first glance. Saint-Saëns

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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was a pupil of Halévy and Gounod at the Paris Conservatoire. He is no stranger to England, having paid several visits to London, and played in the chief provincial cities. His cantata "The Lyre and the Harp" was written expressly for the Birmingham Festival of 1879.

## TSCHAIKOWSKY'S "EUGENE ONEGIN"

**THIS** opera, by Russia's greatest composer, the writer of the famous "Pathétique" symphony, has been staged several times in recent years, and may yet have a larger place in the repertoire. The libretto, based on a story in verse by Pushkin, is unfortunately disconnected and lacking in incident.

Mme. Larina, a landed proprietress and the mother of Tatiana and Olga, is visited at her country estate by Lenski, a neighbouring proprietor, who is engaged to Olga. He brings with him his friend Eugene Onegin. Tatiana, an ingenuous-minded girl of romantic disposition, sees in Eugene the hero of her girlish dreams and falls in love with him. In a letter to Eugene she confesses her love, and appoints a meeting. Eugene, a disappointed, misanthropic person, keeps the appointment, but returns the girl's letter and advises her to restrain her feelings. Then (with the second Act) comes Tatiana's birthday and a dance given in its honour by Mme. Larina. Eugene Onegin is present, and capriciously aggravates his friend Lenski by his attentions to the latter's fiancée, Olga, a heartless flirt. Maddened jealousy leads to a

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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duel, and Onegin shoots Lenski. Some years elapse. Then Tatiana is found at St. Petersburg by Onegin as the wife of Prince Gremin. He now falls deeply in love with her, and in a trying scene pleads with her to fly with him. Tatiana, although admitting her love for him, declines, and makes her escape; whereupon Onegin ends his existence.

The usual overture is replaced by a prelude framed on the Tatiana motive, though the composer has throughout the opera made a more sparing use of "leading themes" than he had done in his earlier "Vakoula the Blacksmith." There are many interesting features in the score, including the wonderfully exquisite duet for Tatiana and Olga, and the lovely scene in Tatiana's bedroom, both in the first Act; the quaint, old-fashioned waltz and the arrestingly original mazurka in the second Act; the brilliant polonaise, the dainty waltz, and the grandiose finale in the third Act. The character of Tatiana greatly appealed to Tschaikowsky, and his letters show that he took much interest in the work. It is not, however, until the last Act, in the impassioned scene between Onegin and Tatiana, that he would seem to have been stirred to write real dramatic music. The chorus of peasants and their dances in the first scene are typically Russian, and the whole of the ballroom music is captivating.

"Eugene Onegin," finished in February 1878, was first performed in March 1879, by the students

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## “EUGENE ONEGIN”

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of the Moscow Conservatoire. “Never was any opera rehearsed with such zeal,” we are told. Tschaikowsky had been away from Moscow and only put in an appearance at the last rehearsal, when the theatre was in darkness except for a few candles in the orchestra. In the scene in which Tatiana writes her love-letter to Onegin, he was deeply affected. “How lucky it is dark,” he said, “for this touches me so that I can hardly restrain my tears.” There was an unprecedented rush at the performance, but the music was of too high an order to be appreciated at a first hearing. Even the St. Petersburg critics spoke coldly of the work, and not until five years later was it heard in that town. Time, however, increased its popularity, and when the piano score was published it had an immense sale. After having been played in several Continental cities, it was first performed in England at the Olympic Theatre, London, in October 1892. Tschaikowsky thought highly of the opera, but did not consider it suitable for a large theatre. He wrote eleven operas altogether, but only “Eugene Onegin” is known, or likely to be known, in this country.

Peter Iljitsch Tschaikowsky was born in Russia in 1840, and died (of cholera) at St. Petersburg in 1893. He studied law; entered the Government service; became a pupil of the Petersburg Conservatoire; and in 1866 teacher of harmony there, a post which he held till 1877. After that, he devoted his whole

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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attention to composition, latterly with a pension from the Czar. There was a good deal of romantic mystery about his life and career, particularly about his marriage. The honorary degree of Doctor of Music was conferred on him by Cambridge University in 1898.



## DEBUSSY'S "PELLÉAS AND MÉLISANDE"

"The Debussy cult," says a London musical journal (1909) "is making great progress in this country. It has reached that interesting stage when many people who are really desperately bewildered, affect to perceive beauties and wonderful meanings that have probably entirely escaped the attention of the composer. But there is no mistaking the depth and width of the influence Debussy is exerting on the art. His music may be classed as nebulous, fragile, diaphanous, and so on, but one cannot resist the languor of the hazy atmosphere with which it envelops and mesmerises the listener. What one appears to miss is the attribute of strength and grip and clearness of purpose. It is nearly always veiled suggestion and an appeal to imaginativeness."

THIS quotation may serve as an interesting key-note to the notice of "Pelléas and Mélisande." The opera—first produced in Paris in 1902—is in five Acts, and the libretto is adapted from the lyrical drama of Maurice Maeterlinck.

Goland, the brother of Pelléas, while hunting in the forest, comes upon a beautiful girl weeping by a well. This is Mélisande. Six months later, Goland writes to his brother announcing his marriage to Mélisande, and his approaching return to his grandfather, King Arkel. The pair arrive, and Mélisande

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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meets Pelléas. The latter takes her to a certain fountain into which she accidentally drops her betrothal ring. On her return she finds her husband lying injured on a couch. He is distressed by her loss of the ring, and sends her away in search of it. A love scene follows at Mélisande's chamber window, interrupted by Goland, who warns his brother not to trifle with her as she is in delicate health. His suspicions of Pelléas are aroused, and he sets his little son by a former marriage to act as spy. Goland begins to behave in a wild and incomprehensible fashion, twisting his wife's long hair round and round her body. She meets Pelléas once more by the fountain, where Goland finds them and slays his brother. The last Act is in Mélisande's bed-chamber, where, after the birth of her child, she lies dying, protesting that her love for Pelléas was absolutely innocent.

It was long before musicians understood the extended scenes in Wagner's later works, in which the ordinary airs and concerted pieces of classical opera did not figure. Many years elapsed before the public took interest in them, except portions like the Valkyrie Ride and the Siegfried March, which they could follow with tolerable ease. In "Pelléas and Mélisande" classical forms are also set aside; but, unlike those of Wagner, the scenes are very short. The opera has been sympathetically analysed by Mr. W. H. Daly, the author of an interesting

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## “ PELLÉAS AND MÉLISANDE ”

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brochure on this most modern of modern composers.

Briefly, it proceeds freely in an atmosphere of music which really facilitates its action, intensifying the effect of every significant point, translating into sound the vague, curious, permeating sentiment of the play. Nothing is sacrificed to musical effect, and yet in no opera is there a more vital union between drama and music; in no other opera is the music more truly and essentially the ultimate and complete expression of the dramatic text. It is, in short, a unique and fascinating work. Whether the general opera-going public will ever really enjoy it cannot be said. But as an experiment by a skilful and earnest composer it is always bound to excite interest.

M. Claude Debussy was born at St.-Germain-en-Laye in 1862, and studied at the Paris Conservatoire where, like so many more of the French opera composers, he took the *Prix de Rome*. In early youth he was an ardent Wagnerite, but shook off the spell after a sojourn in Russia, where he came under the influence of such modern Russian composers as Moussorgski. Though he had written a good deal before that time, it was not until the production of “Pelléas and Mélisande” that his claims to attention were recognised. Now he is one of the men over whom the critics wrangle, as they used to wrangle over Wagner.

## STRAUSS' "ELEKTRA"

"ELEKTRA" was the sensation of the Beecham London Opera season of 1910, the opera being then performed in England for the first time. It had been produced in Dresden only the year before, since which event it was the chief work of its class to challenge the world's verdict. On the whole, that verdict has been that it displays Richard Strauss' genius at its best and worst.

The story dealt with is a sombre one—a Teutonic version of Sophocles' great tragedy. Clytemnestra, with the aid of her paramour Ægistheus, has procured the murder of her husband Agamemnon, and is now in fear of the discovery of her guilt by her children, Elektra, Chrysothemis, and their banished brother Orestes. Elektra, who is the embodiment of vehement lust for vengeance, endeavours to persuade her meeker and shrinking sister to kill the guilty pair. Before the design is carried out Orestes, whose death had been announced, appears, and when he learns from Elektra the fearful truth, he resolves himself to avenge his mother's crime. He kills Clytemnestra and Ægistheus, and Elektra, in a delirious joy-dance, falls dead before her horror-

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## STRAUSS' "ELEKTRA"

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stricken attendants. This is the tragic end of the play. There is only one scene—an inner courtyard bounded by the back of a palace.

It is difficult to say anything effective about the music in a non-technical book like this. But the pregnant remark of an acute critic will go a long way: "It is particularly noticeable with Richard Strauss that his favourite line of work lies in the region of the perverse and unnatural." This is almost painfully obvious in "Elektra," as in the same master's "Salomé." In "Elektra," the gloom and horror which pervade the play are evidently the features which chiefly attracted the composer. Here is a drama whose solitary motive is revenge, a drama containing no love interest, no light relief—nothing but an hour and three-quarters of black hate. The angularity of some of the vocal music is at times repellent, and, being so, seems to defeat its purpose of expression and naturalness. It is admittedly a powerful work, but with features that induce doubt and are unconvincing. It can hardly become popular. Meanwhile, it is novel and so deserving of notice.

Richard Strauss was born at Munich in 1864, where his father was a royal chamber musician. He early drew attention to himself by a serenade for 13 wind instruments, which Von Bülow performed frequently with the Meiningen orchestra. In a recent interview, he says: "I compose everywhere—in noisy hotels, in my garden, in railway carriages;

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## FAVOURITE OPERAS

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my sketch-book never leaves me, whether walking or driving, eating or drinking. And soon as a motive, fitting into the theme upon which I am working, strikes me, I commit it to my best companion—my note-book.”

Some confusion exists in the popular mind as to the identity and relationship of the many Strausses who have earned fame in the musical world. It is sufficient to say here that the composer of “Elektra” has no connection whatever with the Strauss family of waltz composers.



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